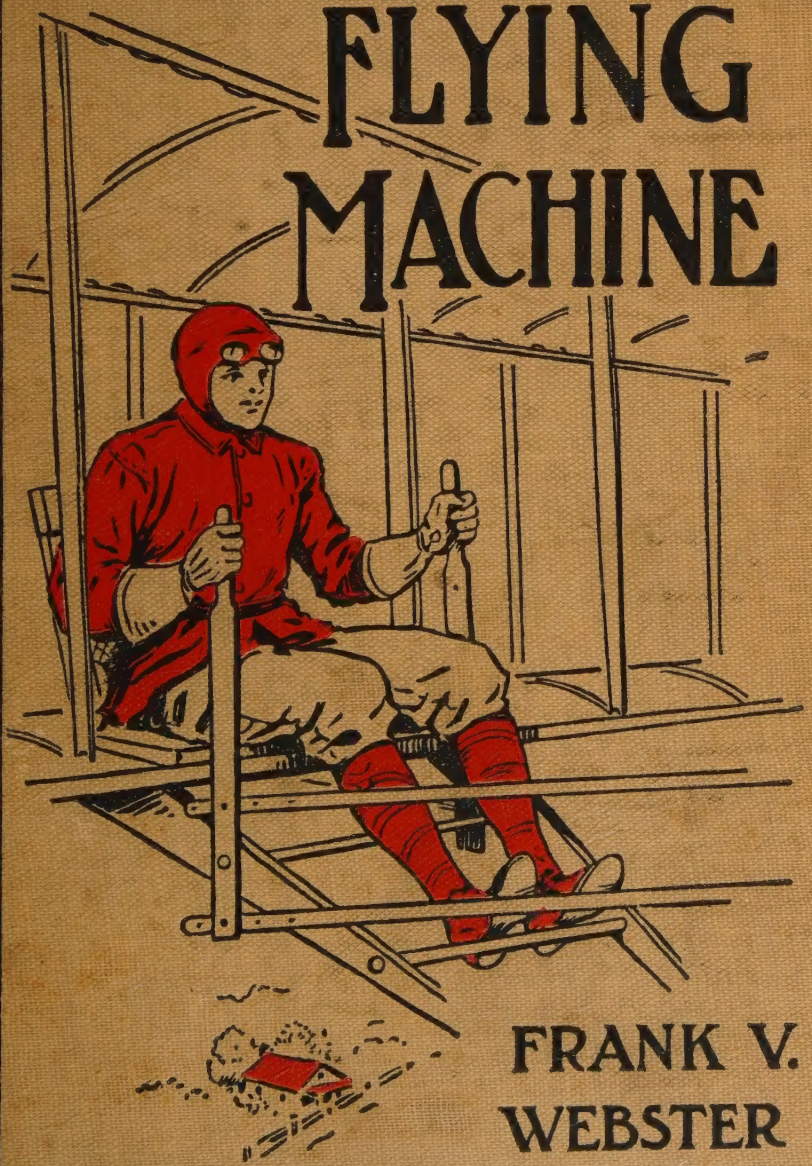
BEN HARDY'S FLYING MACHINE



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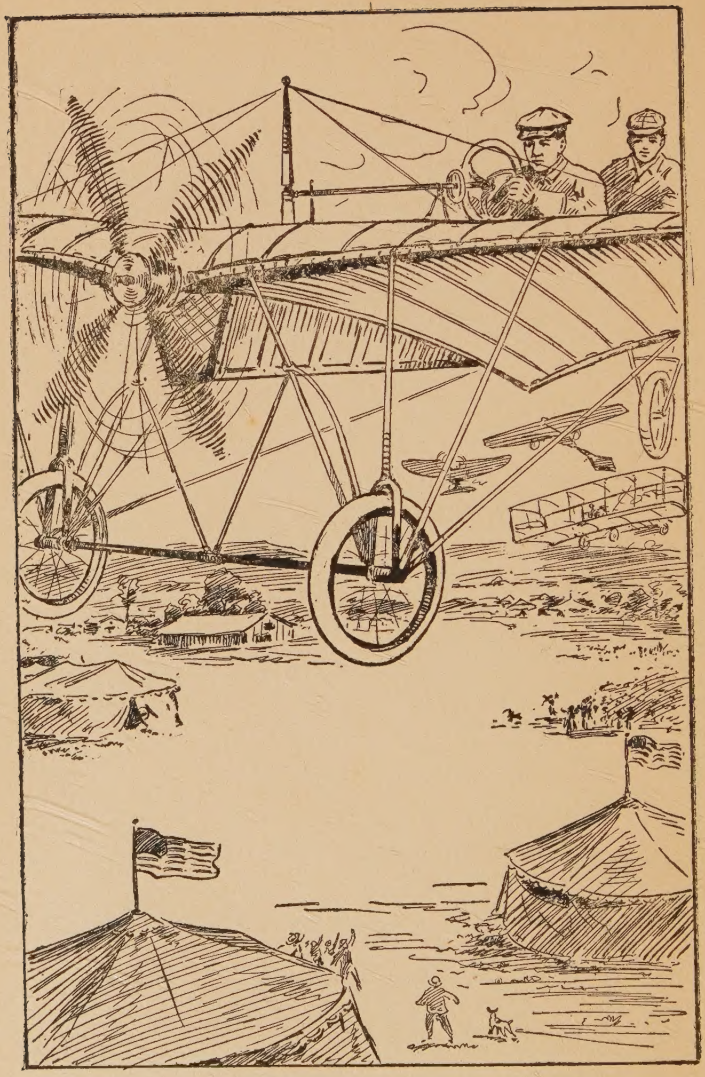

THE DART AROSE ON A SPLENDID ARROW COURSE.

BEN HARDY'S FLYING MACHINE

Or

Making a Record for Himself

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

AUTHOR OF "ONLY A FARM BOY," "AIRSHIP ANDY," "TOM THE TELEPHONE BOY," "THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTER," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FRANK V. WEBSTER

12mo. Cloth. Illustrated. Price per volume, 40 cents, postpaid

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BOB CHESTER'S GRIT
BEN HARDY'S FLYING MACHINE
DICK, THE BANK BOY
DARRY, THE LIFE SAVER

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BEN HARDY'S FLYING MACHINE

CHAPTER I

"NOBLY REWARDED!"

"TAKE care—that engine is going to run wild!"

Those words, yelled out by a brawny mechanic, announced a moment of excitement in the Saxton Automobile Works, the home of the celebrated Estrelle machine.

The big steam engine of the plant had slipped the belt. There was a jar and then a crash. Then the big driving wheel of the engine began speeding like an uncontrollable monster. Clouds of steam covered the boiler room like a snow bank. The machine shop gearing snapped and vibrated, and the building began to shake from end to end.

One big man with a shout of dismay ran for the front of the shop, and disappeared through its doorway into the street. This was Jasper Saxton, the owner of the establishment. His example was fol-

lowed by several of the clerks in the glass-partitioned office at the front of the building. Most of the twenty odd machinists in the shop, however, stuck to their posts.

"Danger—look out!" shouted old Caleb Dunn, the foreman.

Every man at a lathe immediately slipped the belt of his special machine. Those at the further end of the shop did not attempt this. They dodged and ran away from their posts of duty.

There was a reason for this. One end of the big shaft nearest the engine had dropped. The jar of the engine had either broken a connection of the shaft or it had slipped a bearing. At all events, the shaft had taken a sidelong swing and had struck the floor, reducing a plank to splinters. There it turned, wobbled about and slammed up and down, smashing everything that came in its way.

"Do something, men!" shouted Martin Hardy, head machinist of the auto works.

As he spoke Mr. Hardy started on a run for the rear of the machine shop, but he was anticipated. His son, Ben Hardy, had arrived on the scene just in time to take part in the thrilling event of the moment.

It was after school hours, and Ben always had free run of the plant. His father was an expert in his line and an old and valued employee, and his son, with his cheerful, accommodating ways, was always

a welcome visitor with the workmen, with whom he was a general favorite.

Ben was familiar with every turn and corner of the shop. In a flash his eye took in the unusual situation as it presented itself. He guessed out the cause of the commotion intuitively.

"Don't go, father!" he cried, seizing his father's arm and detaining him. "I know the way."

Ben did, indeed, know the way. A sliding iron door separated the engine room from the machine shop. Above it was an open space, and through this the steam was pouring. Ben knew that it was many chances against one that the iron door was caught on the other side. Besides this, the wobbling shaft piece was still threshing about, a formidable barrier, although the power was dying down as the connecting dismantled shafts revolved less rapidly.

In a far corner of the machine shop there was a sashless window frame. Through it Ben had clambered many a time. It was used for ventilation. It opened upon the roof of a small brick oven which was used to bake the sand cores used in the molding flasks.

Ben leaped through the aperture and landed on the roof in a second. Beyond it rolled the iron drum which ground the fine charcoal for the dust bags employed in drying the wet sand in the molding frames. This Ben cleared at a bound.

He heard a timber fall in the machine shop, and

there was an ominous quaking of the staunch timbers all over the place as his feet landed on the hard cindered floor of the boiler room.

"Where is Shallock, the engineer, all this time?" murmured Ben, and running alongside of the boiler he discovered that the man was mysteriously missing from his post at a critical moment.

Through the clouds of steam fast escaping from the overheated boiler Ben made out the engineer. He knew Tom Shallock well, and was not astonished at his present condition. He knew the son of the engineer, Dave Shallock, still better. Ben had no reason to feel particularly friendly towards either, but he sought honestly to save the engineer from the loss of his position and disgrace.

Shallock sat huddled back in the big heavy armchair in which he rested between spells of alternate duty to engine and boiler. He was his own fireman, and his chair was directly in front of the furnace door. Ben ran at him and shook him forcibly by the arm, with the urgent words shouted into his ear:

"Wake up, Mr. Shallock, there's trouble!"

But the engineer simply grunted in an incoherent way, and a half-filled bottle that had slipped from his hand to the floor told the whole miserable story.

Ben darted past the helpless man and ran down two stone steps to the engine pit. It was well that he was a boy who noticed things and usually kept his bearings well in mind, for he had to grope

his way. A thrill of gladness ran through his frame as his hand finally rested on the valve wheel. Two turns, and Ben drew back gasping for breath and reeking with perspiration. The whiz of the great driving wheel lessened, the governor slowed down to a stop. Returning to the boiler room, Ben set the escape valve on the boiler and knew that he had saved the day.

Some men came running in from the molding room. One of them went to the iron door and unset its latch and rolled it open, for some one was hammering vigorously on it on the other side. It was Mr. Hardy.

"Rouse him up, quick," spoke Ben to one of the molders, and with a motion of his foot he kicked the tell-tale liquor flask towards the ash pit.

The man laughed, winked, and with the aid of a comrade dragged the engineer to his feet. By this time Mr. Hardy had reached the spot. Pressing past him, the foreman faced the blinking engineer sternly.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Faugh!" as he caught a whiff of the engineer's breath—"at the old trick again, eh?"

"Steam overcame me," stammered Shallock.

The shop foreman turned to Ben.

"Did you do that?" he inquired in his sharp, crisp way, waving his hand towards the engine.

"I shut off the power—yes, sir," replied Ben.

"What was this man doing?"

Ben hesitated and flushed up. He did not wish to tell on anybody, much less a person who disliked him and would be sure to ascribe any "peaching" to spite.

"You needn't answer," suddenly spoke the foreman, his keen eye catching sight of the bottle, and picking it up. "Get out of here, you," he added disgustedly, giving the engineer a shove towards the door.

"Look here, Mr. Dunn——"

"You get!" reiterated the foreman.

Shallock began to snivel.

"See here, you may be sick yourself some time," he declared in a maudlin tone.

"Sick!" repeated the foreman contemptuously.

"I've run my engine two years——"

"It isn't your engine any more," observed the foreman. "One of you men go for Pete Doty," he continued to the group from the molding room. "He's out of a job, and he can have this one if he qualifies right. That's all," added Dunn, with a peremptory wave of his hand.

The signal was understood promptly by all hands to get back to their respective places. Mr. Hardy moved over to the side of Ben. He placed a hand on his son's head and his eyes were full of emotion.

"I am proud of you, my son," he said simply.

"You ain't the only one," broke in Dunn, brusque-

ly brushing Mr. Hardy aside and catching Ben's arm in his iron grip. "You come with me, boy."

He was a resolute hustling piece of humanity, always doing things forcefully. With a rush he dragged Ben into and through the machine shop.

"Good boy!" spoke a machinist, patting Ben on the shoulder as he passed him.

"You did it grand, lad," commended a second.

"Three cheers for Ben Hardy!" roared Tim Grogan, a jolly and independent apprentice.

The enthusiastic cheers, given with a will, died away as the foreman and Ben reached the office.

"Where's Saxton?" demanded Dunn in his bluff off-handed way.

"He went outside the building," explained the bookkeeper, who had suspended work and looked anxious and flustered. "Say, is the danger over?"

"Oh, maybe a few shingles shaken off the roof. I reckon Saxton went outside to see how many," retorted the foreman sarcastically. "Here he comes."

The portly proprietor of the works at that moment came strutting through the front doorway. He was very consequential, now that the peril was past.

"Here Mr. Saxton," spoke the foreman, "—you know this boy?"

"It's Hardy's lad, isn't it?" replied Jasper Saxton, with a stare at Ben.

"Yes. He's saved your shop from rattling to pieces, that's all," announced the foreman bluntly.

"That pet of yours, Tom Shallock, was in liquor and asleep at his post. If Ben here hadn't got in action there'd have been a long shut-down of the Saxton Automobile Works, I can tell you, and maybe some funerals."

Saxton looked annoyed and angry at the reference to the engineer, and slightly bored at the determined way in which his foreman kept pushing Ben to the front. All this embarrassed the latter, who tried to wriggle free from the grasp of the foreman.

"Where is Shallock?" asked Mr. Saxton uneasily.

"Fired," tersely reported the foreman.

"Why—I—that is——" stammered Mr. Saxton.

"You act as if you were afraid of that man, Mr. Saxton," observed the foreman bluntly. "I've sent for Pete Doty. He'll be here directly. About this boy, now——"

"Yes, yes," nodded Mr. Saxton hurriedly. "Good boy. First-class father, too. Shake hands. Glad. Thank you."

"Hold on, Mr. Saxton," interrupted the foreman, as his employer started to close the incident by entering the office of the works. "What are you going to do for young Hardy?"

"Do—eh. Ah, I see. Come into the office, Hardy."

Ben obeyed the order. Mr. Saxton looked nettled, and Ben felt dreadfully conscious. The former put his hands in a pocket and drew out a roll of

bills. These he promptly transferred to another pocket. He next fished out a dollar, glanced at it, then at Ben, went over to a desk, drew out a money draw and changed the large silver coin.

He pocketed three quarters and handed the other twenty-five cent piece to Ben.

"Oh, no," dissented Ben, drawing back. "There is no need of that, Mr. Saxton."

"I insist," said Mr. Saxton grandly. "You've done quite a big thing, Hardy, and you deserve the reward."

CHAPTER II

JUST IN TIME

"THANK you," said Ben.

"Don't mention it," responded Jasper Saxton.

The manufacturer turned from Ben with a decided expression of relief on his face. He acted like a man who had got off cheaply.

It was in Ben's mind to ask Mr. Saxton if he "was to keep all of the twenty-five cents," but sarcasm was not Ben's forte. He was too ingenious to cherish resentment against either friend or enemy. Ben simply pocketed the coin. He concealed a smile of comicality. The situation, displaying Jasper Saxton's usual meanness, rather tickled him.

He was about to turn and leave the office when an extraordinary movement on the part of Saxton enchained his attention. The latter with something between a growl and a yell had described an active jump. He landed up against a parcel bench on which lay a variety of small machine parts, bagged and ready for shipment.

"What! hasn't that gone yet?" he shouted, his

hand closing over a small steel section of some machine weighing about ten pounds.

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed the bookkeeper, "I was just going to wrap that up and send it when the shop began to shake. I'll attend to it immediately, sir."

"Immediately!" howled Saxton, as the bookkeeper fumbled over twine and wrapping paper—"why, it's special. Do you understand that? The man it is for is expecting it at the depot. He is to leave on the five o'clock train, and it's—seven minutes of five now!" yelled the manufacturer, glancing at his watch. "Here, wrap it quick, and send the office boy kiting with it fast as you can."

"Dan has gone for the mail, sir," said the office man.

"Then hustle with it yourself," ordered Saxton.

"You forget that I am lame," submitted the bookkeeper reproachfully.

"It's got to go," stormed the manufacturer. "Hold on, there."

He shouted these last words at Ben just as the latter was about to leave the office.

"Yes, sir!" said Ben inquiringly.

"I've paid you that money, you know—you'll do a little extra job, hey?"

"With pleasure," answered Ben, with his usual bright accommodating smile.

"That's a good boy," said Mr. Saxton. "Hustle, now," to his bookkeeper.

Ben stood awaiting the package from the nervous fingers of the office employee. He was more amused than disappointed in the narrow view Mr. Saxton took of things in general. The quarter of a dollar and the "extra job," as he designated it, were characteristic of the tight-fisted manufacturer. His treatment of Ben had been of a piece awarded Mr. Hardy, and Ben was not much surprised.

The Saxton Automobile Works was doing a large and growing business, but it was not his own business ability, as the self-centered manufacturer imagined, that had brought about all this progress and prosperity. Mr. Hardy had designed the Estrelle auto. The Saxton Company never gave him credit for this. Ben's father was more of an inventor than a business man, and he had never protected himself as a shrewder man might have done.

He was a valuable workman in the Saxton service and received very good pay. Ben, however, had always thought that his father should have been given more credit and money that he really got.

Ben's mother had often talked to her husband about this. Finally Mr. Hardy had gone to Mr. Saxton and had put the case before him. Nearly all the new and popular points about the Estrelle machine were inventions of Mr. Hardy. Jasper Saxton did not deny this, but he proposed that the patents be taken out in his own name. In an indefinite way he agreed to make some kind of an equitable settlement

with his employer as soon as the rush season was over. Mr. Hardy asked for a memorandum of the agreement.

To this Mr. Saxton reluctantly consented after a great deal of delay. Mr. Hardy placed the precious document in his coat pocket. When he went back to work he hung up his coat in its usual place. When he got home that night the written agreement was missing.

An unavailing search was made for the document. Then in a day or two Mr. Hardy went back to his employer and related the circumstances, asking for a new copy of the agreement.

Mr. Saxton put him off on the pretext of being very busy. Then, when urged by Mrs. Hardy and Ben, the head machinist again approached Jasper Saxton, the latter told him that if he would wait till the active selling season was over and he could get at his books, they would go together to a lawyer and have a contract drawn up in due legal form.

Mr. Hardy was easily satisfied and rested content with this promise. His heart was in his work. When Ben intimated that he was dealing with a man with a general reputation for business slipperiness, his father told him that it would come out all right. He was sanguine that Mr. Saxton would do the liberal thing by him as soon as the selling season was over.

"Here you are," said the bookkeeper, at last completing the packing of the steel fittings.

"Where am I to deliver it?" inquired Ben, accepting the parcel.

"Name's on the bag," explained Jasper Saxton hurriedly.

Ben glanced at the bag and read the name: "John R. Davis."

"All right," he said. "Will he be at the depot?"

"He is leaving for Blairville on the five o'clock train," said Jasper Saxton. "You'll know him when you see him—large, tall man with a full beard, and wears gold eye glasses."

"I will find him if he's there," said Ben confidently.

"Don't delay, boy," broke in the manufacturer, "you've got barely five minutes."

Ben placed the parcel under his arm and passed from the office. He made a bee-line for the front door, to be interrupted by a shout.

"Hey there, Hardy!"

"I'm in a desperate hurry, Mr. Dunn," said Ben, recognizing his challenger.

"Never mind—only a moment." The big foreman got to Ben's side and gripped his arm. "What did he give you?" he demanded.

"It isn't fair to tell," declared Ben, with an evasive smile.

"You'll tell me," firmly insisted the foreman.

"Well then—twenty-five."

"H'm! He gave the night watchman only ten

dollars when he saved the shop from burning down. Twenty-five dollars? That's pretty fair—for Saxton."

"Don't delay me, Mr. Dunn," again pleaded Ben, tugging to get loose.

"Just one more question," said the foreman.

"Be quick, then."

"Which do you like best—open face or hunting case watch?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Ben, with a start.

"They've started a little appreciation list back there. Come, which is it?"

"Oh, Mr. Dunn!"

"Decide, or we'll buy you both," declared Ben's determined captor.

"Any boy would like an open faced watch," said Ben.

"All right, you can go now," said Dunn, with a chuckle.

Ben darted off on a sprint to make up for lost time. It was four blocks to the depot, and he had about three minutes to make it in. As he darted through the front doorway of the works Ben heard the first starting bell ringing out at the depot.

"I've got to hustle to make it!" he declared. "No, it can't be done. I know what I'll do—I'll cut across the triangle."

Ben figured that this short cut across a dumping yard would land him up to the train before it got

going at full speed. His calculations, however, were somewhat at fault. As he neared the tracks the train came down the rails at a pretty good rate of speed.

Ben waited till the baggage car and one passenger coach had passed him. Then, hampered by his bundle, he gave it a fling and landed it on the platform of the second coach.

Poising for a spring and a catch, Ben made a grab for the railing of the last car.

Then he gripped firmly at its outer edge. With a wrench he was pulled from the ground, but clung sturdily, his feet flying out in the air like streamers.

"IV'E MADE IT!" PANTED BEN HARDY.

CHAPTER III

A NEW FRIEND

"I've made it!" panted Ben Hardy, with a swing landing both feet safely on the platform of the last car of the speeding train.

"Now to find my man," he added, pausing a moment or two to catch his breath and then entering the coach.

Ben had the name of the man well in mind to whom he was to deliver the machine parts. He also recalled the vague description given of the man by Mr. Saxton. The lad glanced casually at the occupants of the seats on each side of the coach as he proceeded down the aisle of the car.

No tall bearded man with eye glasses showed up, and gaining the front platform of the coach Ben took up the package where it had landed and entered the next car.

"Fare, there," pronounced the conductor of the train, confronting him.

"Oh, yes," said Ben with a smile, resting his package on a radiator and producing the quarter Mr.

Saxton had given him. "Ought to keep it to frame as a souvenir, I suppose," added Ben to himself comically, "but it happens to be all the money I've got. First stop, conductor—the junction, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"I'll go that far. Take fifteen cents out of that," directed Ben, producing the reward coin.

"It's twenty-five cents if you don't have a ticket," announced the conductor, "ten cents extra, that's the rule."

"That's so," said Ben with a wry grimace.

"You'd ought to have thought of that," suggested the conductor.

"I didn't have much time to think of anything except getting aboard this train double quick," answered Ben. "You don't happen to know a gentleman named Mr. Davis, do you, conductor?"

The fare collector shook his head in dissent and proceeded on his round of duty to the rear coach. Ben took up his package again and began to scan the passengers beyond him.

"That twenty-five cent piece ought to have turned out counterfeit to carry out the fun of the thing," smiled Ben "There's a likely prospect—I think it is my man," added the youth, fixing his eyes upon a person occupying a double seat near the front of the coach.

This individual had a heavy beard, was tall and athletic, wore eye glasses, and was acting excited

and nervous. He would glance from his car window and then ahead and back in the coach, and half arose as if to go in search of a train official to ask some important question.

As Ben approached the seats he occupied, he noticed a book of mechanical drawings lying open against the front cushions. Also leaning against the seat were several quite long parcels. The ends of these showed what Ben took to be rods or bars. The man was certainly in the mechanical line, Ben reasoned, and he advanced without hesitation.

"Is this Mr. Davis?" he inquired politely.

"Yes, that's me," responded the other, turning quickly and fixing an eager glance on his questioner.

"Glad to have found you," said Ben. "I am from the Saxton Automobile Works, and this is for you."

Mr. Davis was so glad to receive the machine part that he took it from Ben's hands and held it under his own arm as if it were some precious treasure.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed heartily, a pleasant smile chasing away the anxiety on his face. "I was worrying over it, I tell you. I simply had to have it to-day. Here, sit down. I fancy you've been doing some fast running, eh?"

"A little," rejoined Ben with a laugh. "It was jolly, though. You see, a fellow likes to beat a hard task just for practice once in a while."

Ben sank to a seat greatly enjoying the relief from

a severe strain. His companion looked at him with interest and remarked:

"I was afraid that part wasn't going to reach me. Thought it was strange, too, for I had been very explicit in my directions. I told the Saxton people to spare no expense so I got it in time. As it was a sort of test as to what you folks could do and meant lots of work for your shop in the future, I counted on the right work on time."

The speaker unpacked the part. Ben knew something about machinery, and observed that it was a double eccentric with several complicated attachments. He recognized it as a class of work always given into his father's expert hands. It was exquisitely turned, jointed and polished.

"Neat as the works of a watch, eh?" said Mr. Davis admiringly. "That's what I call fine work."

"My father always does fine work," said Ben, with a tinge of pride.

"Oh, your father had a hand in this, did he?" questioned Mr. Davis.

"I think so—yes, I am sure of it," answered Ben, inspecting the part. "I remember him mentioning it as something outside of the usual run, and wondering what it was to be used for."

"It is a part of the machinery of my new airship," explained Mr. Davis.

"Oh, say, is that it?" ejaculated Ben with great animation, and his eyes wandering to the open book

on the seat before him, he scanned with interest the outlines of an aeroplane.

"Pleases you, does it?" interrogated his companion.

"Immensely," acknowleged Ben. "My father is the head mechanic at the Saxton works, and he is an inventor, too. He has got up any number of new improvements on the Estrelle car."

"I would like to know him," said Mr. Davis. "I am glad to know you. Let me see, what is your name?"

"Hardy—Ben Hardy."

"Do you work at the Saxton plant, too, Ben?"

"No, sir," answered Ben, "but I spend a good deal of my spare time there. Father works there, you see, and I like machinery."

"How did you come to bring the machine part to me?"

"I happened to be around, and there was no one else to send at the time. The reason it was delayed was that the engine at the works went wild."

"Is that so? Tell me about it."

Ben had not calculated on a casual remark leading to a particular explanation. Before he was aware of it he had pretty nearly recited the whole story of the belt mishap at the Saxton shop.

"They ought to do something pretty fine for you, those people," suggested Mr. Davis. "I am certainly very much obliged to you for your share in

getting this machine part to me. I suppose some day you will go to work at the Saxton plant?"

"I am making drafting a special study," replied Ben, "and I would like to start in at the model desk in the pattern rooms after school is over."

"Do you follow after your father in the invention line, Ben?" asked Mr. Davis seriously.

"I would like to," answered Ben. "I hardly thing it is in me, though, Mr. Davis. I once got up a perpetual motion machine."

Mr. Davis smiled, so did Ben.

"Yes," nodded the latter gaily, "it perpetuated until I had to start it again. The only practical thing I ever did was a whistle which I made out of a simple piece of tin."

"Patented it, did you?"

"Oh, dear, no," explained Ben. "I made it for a friend of mine. He could warble on it like a mocking bird. I never saw anybody else who could, though. There was a certain knack about it that he could get, it seemed. Can I look over that book, Mr. Davis?"

Ben was soon immersed in the drawings before him. His companion seemed greatly pleased at his interest in them. Once or twice, too, he took occasion to commend Ben for some comment or suggestion he made concerning the models.

"Why," he said as they came to the last drawing

of a superb machine, "you seem to have done some digging in the aeroplane line."

"Oh, all I know is second hand," declared Ben. "My father believes that the coming motor is the aeroplane, and has done some experimenting in that line. I have taken a great delight in watching him and helping him. I will have to leave the train in a few minutes, Mr. Davis," he added. "There is the whistle for the junction now, and I will have to get back to Woodville."

"Two things, Ben," said Mr. Davis as he rose from the seat. "It is a big thing for me to get that machine part on time. Here is something for your trouble," and he handed out a folded bank note.

"Oh, no," dissented Ben, arising quickly.

"Oh, yes," insisted Mr. Davis. "Here's the second thing," and he pressed a card into Ben's hand after writing something on its back. "I want you to ask your father to let you come down to the big aero meet at Blairville next week. That card will admit you anywhere about the grounds. I shall be in great evidence there, to speak modestly," smiled Mr. Davis, "and I will take pleasure in showing you some things that will set that active head of yours buzzing for a spell."

Ben's eyes glowed over the welcome invitation.

"I don't know anything that would give me more pleasure than to see those airships go up," said the youth.

"Be sure to come—I shall expect you," declared Mr. Davis, shaking hands warmly.

"Here's luck!" exclaimed Ben, as he alighted on the junction platform, ran across it, and got aboard a train just starting in an opposite direction for Woodville, the conductor of which he knew very well, and who had the privilege of passing friends short distances.

He had calculated on a two-hours' wait at the junction, and here was the afternoon accomodation train, twenty minutes late, but just in time to start him homeward bound without a minute's delay.

Ben reached Woodville and went up to the automobile works at once. It lacked half an hour of quitting time, and he decided he had better report the safe delivery of the machine part at the office. Besides that, he would have a chance to walk home with his father.

"Oh, it's you?" observed Mr. Saxton, as he entered the office.

"Yes, sir," replied Ben.

"Did you deliver the parcel to Mr. Davis?"

"I did, Mr. Saxton. I managed to just catch the train on the fly."

"How was that?"

Ben explained.

"Then you had to go clear to the junction?"

"Or jump off," smiled Ben.

"H'm—cost you fifteen cents, then?"

"No, sir, a quarter. You see there's an extra ten cents when you do not buy your ticket in advance."

"H'm!" again commented the manufacturer. "You ought to get back that rebate. Here, Smith," to the bookkeeper, "give Hardy twenty-five cents."

"Oh, no," dissented Ben, and Saxton brightened up magically. "Mr. Davis insisted on giving me five dollars."

"He did, eh?" spoke Jasper Saxton thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir. He was very glad to get the machine part, and insisted on paying me for what he called my trouble."

"Very good. Glad. That is—h'm—you see—quite right, Hardy."

At first Ben fancied that Jasper Saxton was going to suggest that he divide up the five dollars with the company. However, Mr. Saxton dismissed him with a wave of the hand and Ben went in search of his father.

He recited his recent experience, showed him the five-dollar bill with some pride in his face, and told his father he would wait till quitting time and go home with him.

"I'm afraid we'll have to change that programme, Ben," advised Mr. Hardy.

"How is that, father?"

"Mr. Saxton wants the engine overhauled and that shaft reset, and I will have to put in a few

hours extra time, so I shall not go home till later."

"What about supper, father?" inquired Ben.

"Oh, I'll pick up something at a restaurant."

"Mother will insist on sending something to you, I know," prophesied Ben.

"Well, I won't say that home cooking wouldn't suit me best," confessed Mr. Hardy.

Ben started from the shop, when Caleb Dunn hailed him with the words:

"Hold on there, young man."

"All right," responded Ben, smiling.

The foreman gained Ben's side. He drew a shop-soiled sheet of paper from the pocket of his working blouse.

"Every man in the shop," he announced.

"Every man what?" queried Ben.

"Name signed to the document."

"What for?"

"Subscription."

"Oh!" said Ben, guessing and flushing.

"Understand, do you?" demanded the iron fisted, warm hearted foreman with a grim chuckle. "Testimonial—Watch—Open face—Solid gold—Get out."

He gave Ben a shove and shook his fist playfully at him, and the boy went on his way laughing and feeling joyful.

Ben had to tell the story of the day's experience all over again when he reached home. His mother

said little, as between the lines she read the noble impulses that had actuated the good son of a good father in striving to do his duty and be of benefit to others. She kissed him fondly, however, and her eyes were moist and loving as after supper he started for the works with the basket of food she had prepared for Mr. Hardy.

Ben found the works closed down and his father overhauling some tools, ready to set at work when the foreman, who lived near by, returned from his supper. Mr. Hardy said that they would finish their work by about ten o'clock.

"Let me come up about nine o'clock and watch around, father, and go home with you," suggested Ben.

"I am always glad of your company, my son," said Mr. Hardy.

"All right, I'll be here," said Ben.

He did not go directly home. It was a pleasant evening, and Ben leisurely strolled about the down-town streets, taking in the sights of the liveliest hour of the day among the stores.

"Hello!" he said, quickening his steps as he caught the sound of music, and following its source he noticed a crowd gathered about a corner curb.

As Ben neared the group he discovered a street piano mounted on wheels, being operated by a man. Standing by him was his partner. The latter had a piece of tin between his lips. Keeping in tune with

the hurdy gurdy, he was producing beautiful liquid notes that rang out clear and musical as the soaring notes of a lark.

The crowd was enchanted. The music was novel and harmonious. The whistle gave out notes as clear and pure as those of a flute.

The tune ended. Ben Hardy watched the whistler remove the piece of tin from between his lips. As he did so Ben started forward, his eyes fixed upon the little device intently.

"Why!" exclaimed Ben in profound astonishment, "that is the very whistle I invented for Bob Dallow."

CHAPTER IV

THE "SYBILLINE" WHISTLE

THE whistle he had invented and the name Bob Dallow instantly carried back the mind of Ben to what he looked upon as the pleasantest part of his young life.

About six months previous to the opening of this story Bob Dallow had put in an appearance at the Hardy home. Neither Ben nor his parents had ever seen him before, but the homeless orphan boy had received a hearty welcome.

It appeared that he was the son of a half sister of Mrs. Hardy, and he had come into the Hardy household in such a lively, manly fashion that he had won all their hearts at once.

"Just looking up my scattered relations as I hop about the world, Aunt Mary," he had announced to Mrs. Hardy. "Here to-day and there to-morrow. I won't bother you more than this afternoon and to-night. It makes a fellow feel he's got something to tie to, you know, when he gets lonely, so I thought I would drop in on you."

Bob had been an orphan for two years. Thrown on his own resources, he had gone to work on the first job that offered with a smile, and left it for another one with a hurrah. He fascinated Ben with the happy, good-natured way in which he took the ups and downs of business life.

"Every regular job I get," declared Bob, airily, "there was a separate and distinct hoodoo about it. For instance, the first man I worked for was a groceryman. He confidentially instructed me on his short weight tactics one night and I left the next morning. My second employer was a clothier. He insisted on paying off my first month's salary in a suit damaged by fire and water and four sizes too big for me, so I left him and became a clerk in a dry goods store. My boss there nearly starved me and made me sleep on a box under a stairway. I pined for fresh air and took to the road."

Bob explained that "taking to the road" meant for him, first, a ticket collector for a side show at a circus, next, a brief career at driving a band wagon, and lastly as a chauffeur.

"I am now pretty good at handling a machine," he declared, "and am on my way to a new job for a crack automobile man who makes a specialty of racing for prizes."

Bob brought a rather exciting atmosphere into the quiet Hardy home, but it did not harm any. He succeeded in stirring up some new ideas in the active

mind of Ben, but the latter, his folks knew, loved home life too fondly to ever become a confirmed rover. Then, too, Bob was a boy of excellent principles. There was no bravado or recklessness about his exuberant spirits. He was manly and always seeing the bright side of things, adventurous and undaunted by trivial disappointments.

"I'll make it some day—in a big way. I feel it in my bones," he insisted hopefully.

"I hope you do," replied Ben.

"So will you," declared Bob, enthusiastically, the next day, when, in showing his guest about his little work room at home, Ben brought to light a whistle he had invented. It consisted of a bent circle of tin. This was perforated on one side, and this in connection with a peculiar shaping of the outer lip of the device enabled a person to give out a shrill call that could be heard fully a mile distant on a quiet day.

Ben had distributed freely samples of his handicraft among his boy chums, and on picnic occasions the woods would ring with what his comrades called a bird call. The modest young inventor noticed, however, that most of the users of the whistles never got much beyond a commonplace squeak, while the shrill efforts of the adepts scared the birds away instead of attracting them.

Bob Dallow put a new phase on the affair. His twenty-four hours' visit expanded and was encour-

aged to five days. The last afternoon of his stay, when Ben came home from school he was somewhat excitedly invited by his popular chum to accompany him to the garden.

"See her," said Bob, "—or rather, listen."

Bob placed the whistle between his lips. He began a tune, carried it through, and finished it with a flush of triumph.

"I declare!" exclaimed the delighted Ben, lost in admiration of his friend's splendid efforts. "I never heard better music."

Patience and practice had enabled Bob to become a master of the little device.

"It's a big thing," he insisted, "and if I were you I'd have it patented. I won't say that anybody can play it—not everybody can play a cornet, either. You've got to cultivate what they call the horn lip to do that. You'll find lots that can do it, though. I am one of them. 'Home, Sweet Home' with variations, listen."

"Why, Bob," exclaimed Mrs. Hardy, whom the boys found standing near by quite enraptured with the fine performance of her young guest.

Bob influenced Ben to make him a dozen of the little whistles. When he left the Hardys the next morning with many happy thanks for their kindness to him, his words to Ben were:

"I am going to make some money out of that whistle—see if I don't."

The prediction had somewhat faded out of Ben's mind after the departure of their lively visitor. Bob wrote to him only once, telling him that he was enjoying life as a chauffeur for a liberal employer. For over two months, however, no word had come from the roving boy. As to the whistle, Ben had nearly forgotten about that. Now the subject came up to his mind in quite a forcible way on the public streets of Woodville.

Ben was following the impulse to go forward and request the whistler to let him have a look at the device he used to render such melliferous sounds, when the man at the piano stepped in front of the instrument.

He drew open the flaps of a little satchel swung from his shoulder, revealing a number of tin whistles.

"The Sybilline whistle, gentlemen," he announced in broken English. He was apparently of the better class of foreign street musicians. "This ees not a toy. It ees a musical instrument. We don't say all ones can play as does these professore at my sides. But practeese he make perfects. Only ten cents, gentlemen."

The man with the whistle gave out a vivid and rapid series of thrills, tremolos and bird imitations. A number of purchasers handed up their dimes, Ben among them. Then he retired to one side and closely inspected the whistle.

"Yes," he said, his heart beating a trifle faster with pleasure and pride, "it is the same, it is my invention."

Ben went up to the whistler, who had now ceased playing and was strolling to one side while his partner continued his appeals for purchasers in the crowd.

"Mister," asked Ben, extending his bought whistle, "where do you get these."

"The Sybilline—yes," politely answered the man addressed. "At the city, my friend."

"Where in the city?" pressed Ben.

"At the Central."

"And what is the Central?"

"It is the headquarters—it is the padrone who hires us."

"What is his name?"

"It is Vladimir—he has many, many men who work for him. It is percentages."

"I understand," murmured Ben, drawing back. "This doesn't connect up Bob Dallow, though. Maybe some one else struck the same whistle idea I did."

As Ben reached home he craned his neck, and then hurried his steps with a low cry of surprise and delight. There was a light in the dining-room, and seated at the table enjoying a hastily prepared meal, and waited on by Mrs. Hardy, was the very boy so strongly in his thoughts at the present moment—Bob Dallow.

"Well, well, well!" cried Ben, rushing unceremoniously into the room and greeting the smiling Bob, with handshakes and slaps on the shoulder, "here's a grand sight for sore eyes."

"Glad to see me, are you?" chuckled Bob, with his usual tantalizing imperturbability.

"That's what."

"You'll be gladder soon. Let a famished pilgrim enjoy the rarest cookery in the country first, will you?"

"Say, you're looking pretty prosperous, it seems to me, Bob," said Ben, scrutinizing his chum closely as he reseated himself at the table.

"Think so?" smiled Bob.

"Yes. That's a pretty fine suit you're wearing."

"One of my fine ones—oh, yes," responded Bob, coolly. "Now then," taking a last sup of tea," thank you, Mrs. Hardy—and thank you, Ben."

"What for?"

"That whistle idea of yours."

"Eh?" exclaimed Ben with a start, instantly coupling the musical team downtown with the appearance of his friend.

"You see, I stopped over about the dividends," explained Bob.

"Dividends?" repeated Ben, wonderingly.

"That's the business proposition, exactly," replied Bob, with an affected grand air. "That whistle of yours—well, the results first. See that?"

Very grandly Bob drew out a folding pocketbook and placed it open on the table. Elastic bands held a little heap of new green banknotes on either flap.

"Four hundred dollars," announced Bob, with an expansive chuckle and a grin.

"Where did you get it." stammered Ben.

"Your whistle."

"You're joking, Bob."

"Not at all. There it is, the benefits of your little invention—four hundred dollars, half yours."

CHAPTER V

FOUR HUNDRED DOLLARS

BEN stared in a stupefied way at the money, then at the smiling face of his friend, and then at his mother.

"You're joking, Bob," he said.

"Does that money look like a joke?" demanded Bob Dallow. "Here, that's your share, two hundred dollars. Count it, and then I'll tell you how this little fortune came to travel down to Woodville with me."

Bob removed the banknotes from one flap of the pocketbook and pushed them across the table to Ben. The latter merely fumbled them. He was fairly stunned at the sensational actions of his relative.

"It's all along of that whistle of yours, just as I said," declared Bob. "When I left here two months ago it was to take a job as chauffeur, you remember."

"Yes," nodded Ben.

"It was an easy job and a paying one, so easy

that I began to get fat and lazy. The man I worked for had a lot of sporty friends, and they got to be such wild company I concluded to strike out for something better. I got word of a nice family at Springfield wanting a chauffeur. When I got there I found the place filled. I hadn't much ready cash in my pocket. I'd made fine wages, but I spent it laying in a good stock of clothes. At the end of the week I was pretty near at the end of my rope financially. One evening I was consoling myself driving away the blues with some cheerful tunes on one of your whistles, when a big idea struck me."

"About the whistle?" inquired Ben.

"Just that. When I began outlining plans for making my fortune out of the little device, so many ideas came to me that I began to think I was a natural born promoter. Well, the next morning I swept away all the dreamy schemes from the proposition and went to work in a sensible business-like way."

"What did you do, Bob?"

"I knew a young lawyer in Springfield, and I was sure he would give me his opinion free gratis. He did. After he had heard my story, and had inspected the whistle, and had looked up what he called authorities on the subject, he told me he didn't believe a patent on the whistle would hold water."

"Oh, dear!" commented Ben.

"Even if it would, he said the whistle, being a

mere passing novelty, would soon peg out. He advised me to find somebody who would take the whole business off my hands for a bulk sum—some one who ran a sort of supply headquarters for cheap novelties. That started me on a new tangent. I finally ran across the ideal person—a sort of padrone fellow who hired poor foreigners on a commission. I went to him fully prepared though."

"How was that Bob?" asked Ben.

"Why, I knew he or somebody else would steal the whistle idea if it struck them favorably, unless I made a tangible show of controlling the situation. I made a real impressive looking drawing of the whistle—sectional view and all that, you know. Then I went to a big hardware factory and got a written estimate on the whistle in ten thousand lots."

"Whew!" ejaculated Ben admiringly.

"Oh, I'm no cheap man when I get started," vaunted Bob, with a laugh. "The name of the padrone was Vladimir. When I went to him, I had the drawing and the contract and a lot of big talk all ready. The man was interested at once. He heard me play on the whistle, tried it himself, didn't make much progress, and then shook his head dubiously. Then he called in half a dozen fellows. They were musicians in his employ—mostly hurdy-gurdy men. They all tried the whistle. Four of them got onto the knack at once. Then I made my star hit."

"How was that?"

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"I suggested that he send out a team—organ and whistle—and tab results. The thing went grandly. The next morning, after a lot of dickering, Vladimir gave me four hundred dollars for the outfit."

"Bob, you are a genius," remarked Mrs. Hardy.

"Does the price suit you, Mr. Inventor?" inquired the other, "or did I sell too cheap?"

"Cheap!" cried Ben. "Think of it! All that money mine! What will I ever do with it?"

"Why, invest it in a new invention, of course," cried Bob. "Make it your working capital, and get out something finer and finer till you rival Edison."

"You're poking fun at me," declared Ben. "The whistle was a mere trifle, and an accident. I may know how to handle a few machine tools, but I'm no real inventor, Bob Dallow. Of course——"

Ben paused abruptly. His eyes sparkled as a sudden idea came to him. Quick-witted Bob eyed him keenly. "Go ahead, Ben," he ordered, "of course what?"

"Oh, I was just thinking some foolishness," answered Ben, with a conscious flush.

"What foolishness?" persisted Bob.

"Well then, airships."

"Eh—what's that?" demanded Bob.

"Why, Ben!" murmured his mother.

"What put airships in your head?" pressed Bob, with a token of real curiosity and interest in manner and voice.

"Well, I saw a man to-day who set me wild over them," confessed Ben bluntly. "He is a real airship man himself. He had a book on airships full of drawings, and he has invited me to the airship meet at Blairville next week."

Bob Dallow stared hard at Ben as the latter spoke this outburst.

"Well, well," he said slowly, but forcibly, "you've got them, haven't you? So have I. Invited to the meet at Blairville? Why, that's where I've got my new job."

"You have?" exclaimed Ben.

"Yes. Don't look as if we've both gone dreaming, Aunt Mary," said Bob to his hostess, with a merry laugh, "I'm hit, too. Tell you, I've figured out a system. I've made up my mind to keep up with the procession as it passes along. The automobile was a good stunt while it was fresh. Too common for enterprising fellows now, though. It's all the new fad—airships. I'm headed for it strong. Yes, I've got a chance for work at Blairville, and I'm to report for duty to-morrow."

"What's your airship man's name, Bob?" inquired Ben.

"John Davis."

"Why, that's the name of my friend, too," exclaimed Ben animatedly. "Say, isn't this a queer coincidence?"

Ben handed his money to his mother to keep for

him. Then there was a regular "powwow" between the two boys. For nearly an hour there was a constant chorus of such words as aeroplanes, monoplanes, high speeders, air cars, aerials, aeratoriums, ultra violet rays, upper air mains, barographs and other technical terms, most of them proceeding from Bob, who it seemed had studied up aeronautics, and had acquired a smart smattering of aerial science in general. Then incidentally the conversation reverted back to the whistle, and Ben alluded to the two musicians he had seen playing near the public square.

"That starts me," declared Bob, springing to his feet. "They are two of Vladimir's men, and I have a curiosity to find out how they are doing with the Sybilline."

The two friends went out to the street together. Two squares traversed they separated, Bob, to hunt for the street musicians, Ben to go to the automobile works to join his father.

"You will come back to the house, of course, Bob?" asked Ben.

"I should say I would—if I am invited."

"You don't have to be," declared Ben. "It's welcome home to you whenever you strike Woodville. Father and I will be home some time within an hour, I think."

"All right, Ben."

Bob proceeded towards the business portion of

the town. Ben struck off in the direction of the Saxton shops.

He whistled cheerily as he went along, for he felt pretty exuberant. The stirring events of the day, winding up with the remarkable arrival of his favorite chum, made him happy. The airship feature kept him dreaming, and Ben was overexcited and buoyant.

As he turned a corner he came upon two boys near a street lamp. One was sitting in the shadow of a tree on a fence post. The other Ben recognized as the son of the engineer of the automobile works discharged that day.

"Good evening," hailed Ben pleasantly.

The lad addressed bestowed a fearful scowl on him.

"I didn't speak to you," he muttered.

Ben passed on. He knew the sullen, quarrelsome nature of Dave Shallock quite well. The latter was a bully. Once he had gone too far with his domineering tactics with Ben, and a necessary and unavoidable mixup had resulted, which had taught Dave to keep his place.

"I suppose he feels bad over his father losing his job," reflected Ben sympathizingly. "I know I should, if our positions were changed."

Presently our hero turned quickly at the sound of footsteps behind him. It was to come face to face with the subject of his thoughts. Dave Shal-

lock's eyes had a wicked glare. His hands were clenched, and Ben prepared for an onslaught, but he asked quietly:

"Want to see me, Dave?"

"Yes, I do," retorted Dave, in a husky, rage-filled voice. "I said a minute ago I didn't speak to you. Well, I'm speaking to you now, you hear me! and I've got something to say you won't soon forget."

"What is it about?" inquired Ben.

"It's about your mean, miserable trick in getting my father discharged from the Saxton Automobile Works!" shouted Dave Shallock wrathfully.

CHAPTER VI

THE AIRSHIP IDEA

BEN backed to the fence. He was not a bit afraid of Dave Shallock, but he was fully aware of his tricky nature. He got into a position where he could be sure that Dave's ally, the fellow he had noticed on the fence, did not get a chance to attack him unawares, side or rear.

The boy seated on the fence did not move, however, and Dave himself did not press Ben closely. The latter decided that his adversary had learned his lesson in past encounters, and was simply bent on giving him a tongue lashing.

"Haven't you made a mistake, Dave?" suggested Ben.

"Oh, yes, certainly!" shouted Dave in sarcastic tones, "I only dreamed that your father has been waiting for weeks to shove Pete Doty, his particular friend and crony, into my father's job."

"Mr. Doty is no more my father's particular friend than is any honest deserving man," declared

Ben. "Certainly my father never suggested his name as the successor of your father."

"Tell that to the greenies!" vociferated the furious Dave. "It was all a nice little plot—your jumping in where you had no business, and exposing dad."

"If somebody hadn't stepped in," said Ben, "you mightn't have any father now."

"Oh, is that so." sneered Dave. "I guess my father knows how to run his department without your help. He's been at it long enough."

"He wasn't able to run it to-day, Dave," declared Ben. "He was 'asleep at the switch,' as the saying goes, and I tried to rouse him and keep things quiet."

"Yah! Looks like it, when you let on that he'd been drinking."

"I? Never!" cried Ben indignantly. "On the contrary, I tried to shield him, and I don't know that I had any right to do so, either. Why, I even tried to hide the tell-tale bottle in the ashes."

"That's the way you tell it," interrupted Dave contemptously. "All right. I just wanted to have the satisfaction of telling you that you and your father will rue the day you stuck your noses into our family's business."

"I am sorry for your father, Dave."

"Bah! you can spare your pity. Maybe you'll need it yourselves, you and your father. Wait till the tables turn."

"All right," said Ben simply. "You are wrong in your guesses, though, as to our having any ill will against your people."

"I guess my father has a pull—huh! I guess so," blurted out Dave, as Ben started to leave the spot. "He wouldn't take back his job working about that dirty boiler and that greasy old engine, if they offered him double what he got. I'd have you know that my father is as good a master mechanic as yours is, any day."

"I've heard that he's a fine all-round machinist," acknowledged Ben. "I would like to see him get right up to the top."

"He'll get there. Mark you, Ben Hardy, he's after your father's scalp, and he's going to get it."

"Fair play, and the best man wins," answered our hero briefly.

"There's more than that," shouted Dave down the street after Ben. "My father could just set your father on his pegs. Will he do it? Nix! That's going to be his revenge. Ha! ha! Old Saxton has bamboozled your father, and my father can produce the evidence——"

"Shut up, you chump!" growled the boy on the fence, jumping to the ground and rushing at Dave and silencing him. "Do you want to give the whole snap away?"

Ben recognized the boy now as he came within

the radius of the street lamp. He was a cousin of Dave named Dick Farrell, who lived in another town.

"H'm," commented Ben, as he proceeded on his way, "was that all brag and bluster, or is there something under all this?"

Ben recalled the remark of Dunn to Saxton that afternoon, when the bluff machine shop foreman had told the manufacturer that he acted as if he were afraid of Tom Shallock. He remembered, too, that it was general knowledge about the works that Shallock had been discharged for cause more times than any man in the place, and had always managed to get back again into the employment.

"Dave said, too, that Saxton was bamboozling father," reflected Ben. "Well, I have always thought that myself. I wonder, though, what he means when he talks about his father producing the evidence?"

Ben reached the automobile works figuring out all kinds of suspicions and solutions as to the threatening remark of Dave Shallock. His father and Foreman Dunn had just concluded their labors. Mr. Hardy washed up, and was soon on his way home, Ben chattering exuberantly by his side.

Ben, at his father's request, recited the vivid occurrences of the day. He went into detail about his talk with Mr. Davis, and mentioned the invitation

to the aero meet. Mr. Hardy said nothing as to his prospects of going there, but Ben knew that was his way, always turning a proposition over fully in his mind before he came to a final decision, and the son was hopeful.

"Two hundred dollars?" repeated Mr. Hardy in great surprise, as Ben told about the money Bob Dallow had brought him. "That is a small fortune for a boy like you."

"Father, what did Dave Shallock mean by the threat he made?" asked Ben, quite anxiously, when the conversation had taken a new turn.

"Oh, some boastful nonsense," said Mr. Hardy indifferently. "I have no time to analyze such talk. Tom Shallock would be a fair workman if he would keep sober. It is certainly true that he has some influence with Mr. Saxton, but he cannot injure us. I shall keep right on doing my best, and honest labor will always command a fair market. As to you, Ben, a very pretty and useful token of regard the men are getting for you will show how they esteem you."

Ben tried a hint or two to induce his father to take some action about the patents that he had given under the control of Jasper Saxton, but Mr. Hardy was not responsive.

"Father is pretty tired, I suppose," reflected the youth, "but, all the same, I am going to get mother

to urge him up to some action on that patent business. Delays are dangerous, and I haven't much confidence in Mr. Saxton."

Bob Dallow greeted them as they reached home. Mr. Hardy went into the house, where his wife had a special lunch spread for him.

"Well, Bob, what about the whistle?" inquired Ben.

"Going fine," declared Bob. "We made a big mistake, though."

"How is that?"

"Sold it too cheap. That Vladimir seems to be coining money out of it."

"Well, I am satisfied," said Ben.

The conversation drifted to airships before the two boys had been together five minutes. The enthusiastic Bob declared that he was going to make a big record in the new field he was about to enter so ardently. He predicted that if Ben would study up aeronautics and put his inventive ability to work, he would make a grand success.

"You overrate me," said Ben modestly. "At all events, though, I would like to go to the aero meet next week."

"We'll have one fine time, if you do," returned Bob. "I'll write you as soon as I get fixed in my new position. In the meantime, let us bring up the subject to your father and see what he thinks about it."

Mr. Hardy listened with an indulgent smile to the plans and suggestions of their young guest.

"I haven't the heart to refuse you any reasonable request after your fine record of to-day, Ben," he told his son, "but I want to take a night's sleep over this."

"Yes, that will be best," remarked Mrs. Hardy.

Bob was obliged to be content with this decision. Ben was sure he would be allowed to go to the aero meet. As to any encouragement as to experimenting on a machine of his own, which was a glowing ideal in his mind, he was not so certain.

He regarded his father with anxious expectation as Mr. Hardy left the breakfast table next morning. As was usual they all went out on the porch, where Mr. Hardy generally rested and chatted a few minutes before starting for the automobile works.

"Well, Ben," he said with a pleasant smile, as they became comfortably seated, "I've thought over this new idea which I see Bob has been so industriously cultivating in your mind."

"Blame me, that's right, Mr. Hardy!" spoke up Bob airily. "I'll bet you, though, that something tangible comes out of it."

"Your vacation begins next week, Ben," resumed Mr. Hardy. "You have quite a little capital of your own. You can employ some of it, if you think it wise, in looking up this new idea, and I don't mind helping you a bit on experiments."

"Thank you, father," said Ben joyfully.

"Only don't let all your common sense and practical ideas go up in an airship that won't sail," was Mr. Hardy's final advice.

CHAPTER VII

MYSTERY

"HURRAH—I'm coming!"

Ben Hardy began a brief but enthusiastic letter to his friend, Bob Dallow, with these words.

"It is all settled, Bob," added Ben, "and if you are sure you won't be put out by having me share your quarters, I can stay for the whole week. We will have a glorious time, and I am just wild to see those airship stunts you describe."

School had closed for the long vacation on Thursday. It was now the following Monday, and Ben had his satchel packed and was counting the hours until Tuesday morning and train time should arrive.

Ben had calculated to devote the long vacation to work in the Saxton automobile plant. The pattern shop was a favorite spot with him in his visits to the great factory. He was an adept at drawing, and the foreman of the model department had given him some encouragement as to a future position.

He had, however, advised Ben to wait a year or two and stick to his studies.

Mr. Hardy had done some serious thinking, and had given his son the result of the same. Ben's success with the whistle, his evident liking for machinery, particularly of new types, had caused Mr. Hardy to recall his own early dreams and longings before he became a master machinist.

What pleased the father most was the way Ben went at aeronautics. The evening after Bob Dallow left Woodville, Mr. Hardy came home to find Ben seated before a stand piled high with reading matter, and deeply absorbed in a big volume from the town library.

"Airships, Ben?" inquired his father with an indulgent smile.

"One end of them," responded Ben. "I've ransacked the town for books and magazines bearing on the subject, and as you see I have got a raft of them. They cover mostly the history end of the business, though. I wish I had some of the up-to-date books Mr. Davis showed me."

"What you read now will fit in all right to that later," remarked Mr. Hardy. "Get as familiar as you can with your subject in a general way, Ben. You manage the theoretical end of the business, and when you come back from the aero meet we will join forces on a practical demonstration of the science."

"Will you, father?" pressed Ben eagerly.

"By the time you get back I will screen off a space next to the work shed, and we will see what we can do in making an airship," continued Mr. Hardy. "You have talked over the subject so much, I am inclined to take a flier myself—not up in the air, Ben, but in an inventive way."

Ben was more filled with enthusiasm than ever after that. He had been made doubly happy during the week at receiving a handsome watch, bearing a pleasing testimonial in script on its inner case, for his bravery in saving the auto works from possible wreck.

Ben was not troubled any further by Dave Shallock. He heard that his father, the discharged engineer, was loafing about some low drinking places in the town. Shallock was making all kinds of foolish boasts as to his ability to get a new and better place from "old Saxton," as he designated him. He hinted at a certain powerful influence he had with the manufacturer. So far his bragging had brought no results.

That evening, just about dusk, our hero started from home after supper for a downtown stroll. There was a short cut across a square which had once held a handsome residence, burned down a few months previous.

The high hedge fence, broken in places, still lined the front of the grounds. As Ben neared this he

paused, quite startled. Some one had made a bold rush through the hedge and crouched in a stealthy manner on its other side, as if trying to hide.

"Why," murmured Ben in some astonishment, drawing behind a bush, "it is Tom Shallock!"

Ben wondered what the discharged engineer was up to. He soon learned the motive of his sudden rush from the public street. Almost immediately a sharp mandatory voice beyond the hedge shouted out:

"That will do, Shallock—you come out here, if you want to save trouble."

"Oh, is that you?" stammered Shallock, and he sheepishly retraced his steps to the sidewalk.

"You knew it was, and you tried to sneak away from me, didn't you?" challenged the stormy voice.

Ben was curious enough to press close up to the hedge and peer through it. Shallock stood leaning in a shambling way outside, a crestfallen expression on his face. The man addressing him was a very keen-eyed fellow Ben had never seen before. He was a stranger in Woodville. He carried a whip in one hand, and Ben wondered why this was.

"Now then," spoke the stranger, "what does this mean? You've been trying to keep out of my way for two hours, and I know it. That worthless cub boy of yours sent me off on a false hunt."

"I—I wasn't prepared to see you," said Shallock shiftily.

"Why not?"

"Well, then, I knew what you came after."

"Yes, money."

"Exactly. I had none. I know you're a hard man, and I hoped you'd let me alone for a few days longer."

"See here, Shallock," spoke the other sharply, "I've got just one last warning to give you. Produce one hundred dollars, and get it quick, or I'll close down on you bag and baggage."

Shallock began to snivel in a maudlin way. He had been drinking, and he began to deplore his unhappy lot. He was an unfortunate target of fate. He had lost his job. His grocery credit had been stopped only that day, and he had been obliged to sell some of his wife's jewelry to buy food for the family.

"Not food, but drink for yourself, you mean," derided the stranger testily. "Now then, I'm tired of waiting for that money. I loaned it to you on a promise of repayment due months ago."

"I can't pay when I haven't got it, can I?" demurred Shallock.

"You can get money out of Jasper Saxton."

"Ha! yes—yes, indeed," spurted up Shallock eagerly. "Say, that's just what I'm working on. Honestly, if you'll consent not to trouble me for a week, I'll not only have the best job in the Saxton machine shops, but a lot of ready cash besides."

"I don't know that," remarked the stranger.

"Yes, you do," disputed Shallock. "You know that Saxton has got to fix me out right, or lose a fortune."

"I'd like to see some of your boasted fortune right now," sneered the man.

"Oh, it's coming. Don't press me too hard, and make me spoil the whole business. You shall have double interest. I'll promise you faithfully to settle the whole business in a month. See here, you can't possibly lose. Why, if I failed you, all you've got to do is to take that security of mine and go to Saxton with it."

"I don't fancy mixing up in a blackmailing game," observed the stranger. "Now then, Shallock, I'll give you a last chance. You arrange your business so you can pay me one hundred dollars a week from to-day, the balance by the first of the month, or I'll foreclose on your security."

"I'ts a bargain," declared Shallock, in a tone of hopeful relief. "Yes, sir, if I don't carry out just that agreement, you can take your security to old Saxton."

"Oh, no," said the stranger in a deep decisive voice, "I'll take it to Martin Hardy."

Ben was startled at this last declaration. Shallock uttered a gasp and put out his hands pleadingly.

"Don't do that," he begged in a husky tone, "say, don't do that!"

"You've heard me," replied the stranger, turning his back on Shallock and crossing the street. "I'll do just what I say if you don't raise that money!"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Ben in an excited tone. "Here's some dark plotting, and I'm going to get at the bottom of this."

He ran along the inside at the hedge, passed through it at a break, and observed the stranger just turning the corner of the side street.

As Ben in turn reached it, the crack of the whip rang out. A sharp "Get up!" sent a mettled horse attached to a light gig carrying the stranger away in a flash. Our hero outdistanced, reluctantly admitted to himself that for the present at least he had lost the clew of a big mystery.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE AERO MEET

"Well, Ben, this is life worth living, eh?"

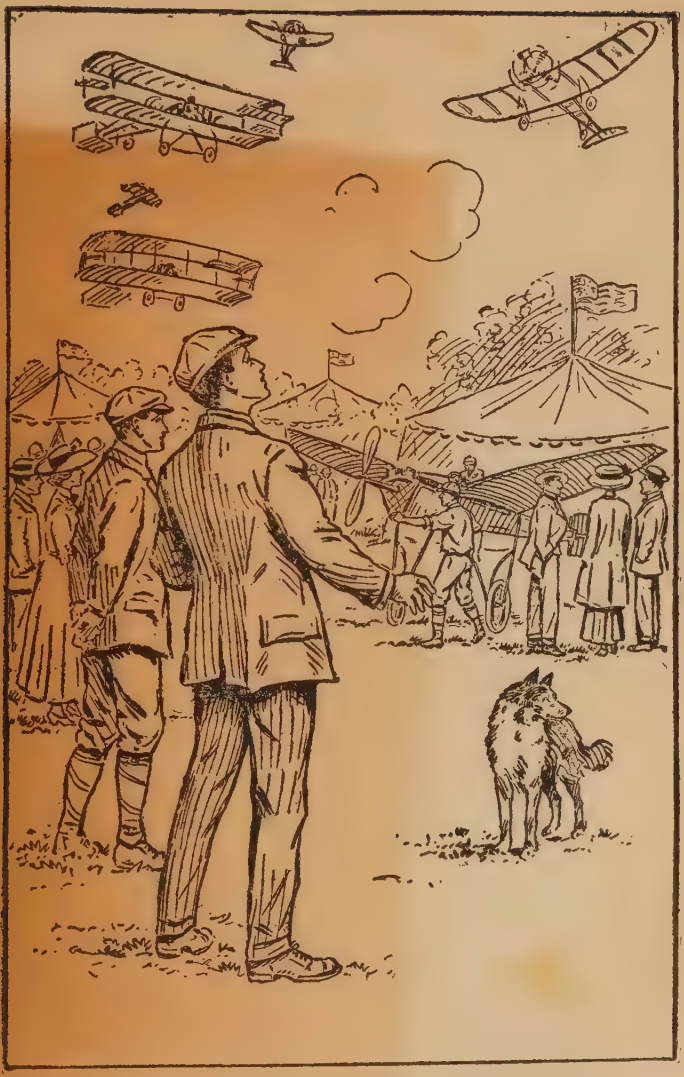
"Bob," declared Ben enthusiastically, "It's been the event of my life."

"And more to come. We want to make an early start to-morrow. I'll show you what real air sailing is then."

Ben Hardy was, indeed, having the liveliest time in all his youthful experience. This was his third day at Blairville, and every minute since his arrival had been packed full of excitement and pleasure.

Mr. Davis had greeted him with a kindly courtesy and attention that would win the heart of any live, up-to-date boy. The fact that he was a relative of Bob Dallow had added to the friendly interest of the aviator. Bob, to use a popular phrase, had made good. He had taken to practical aeronautics like a duck to water.

One week of practice under the direction of the skilled man-bird, Mr. Davis, had proven that Bob was going to become as good an aviator as he



IT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE HAD SEEN A REAL AIRSHIP AFLOAT.

was an accomplished chauffeur. Mr. Davis had comfortable living quarters in a building on the aviation field. Ben was invited to double up with Bob, and they made a happy and a merry team.

The first day had been a bewildering experience of delight and astonishment for Ben. It was an occasion of experiment and preparation for trial flights on the morrow. Bob in his lively way had become a general favorite with the various aeronauts on the field. He and Ben had free entrance to every tent and aero hangar in the enclosure. After a while Ben's interest grew into studious attention, and that evening he pored industriously over the technical aviation literature of which Mr. Davis had a surfeit.

The aviator was more than pleased at the real interest displayed by his willing protégé. Bob Dallow had gratified him with his cool daring and quick adaptation to his new calling. In Ben, however, the old aviator discovered more of the scientific and constructive element. He was kindly disposed, and he seemed decided to give Ben all the encouragement he could.

The second day was fairly spectacular for our hero. It was the first time he had seen a real airship afloat. He had already mastered the mechanism of the aeroplane. Their ready manipulation by the aviators, however, fairly fascinated him.

It was a famous sight to see a venturesome air

sailor start a daring altitude record in the teeth of a wind blowing twenty miles an hour. It was like a dream to watch a machine diminish to a mere speck in the air, and then in a roundabout gyration through several complete circles, wind up in a sensational glide back to its starting place.

Some of the bird-men went so far and so high that they stiffly climbed from their machines as they regained *terra firma*. One monoplane ventured some practicable curves, dashed into a fence and was demolished. There were many triumphs, but some mishaps as well. Ben stored a mass of valuable ideas in his mind that stirring day in his new experience.

Mr. Davis gave the boys a ride in his monoplane, the *Flyer,* the day following. It was Ben's first flight. He went through all the thrills of an initial ascent, but was charmed after the first breathless rush aloft in the subsequent cavortings of the light and dainty fabric of wood and canvas.

The present aero meet was simply preliminary to a contest occasion for prizes two weeks later. A convention at a near city was to intervene. Until the last of the month the enclosed field would be simply a practice campus. On the coming Saturday, however, there were to be some endurance tests which would go far towards deciding the selection of the best aeroplane on the grounds.

Ben had arranged to wait and see this event.

Then he was to return home. He had freely confessed to Mr. Davis that he intended to go into building an airship of his own.

It was Wednesday evening when Ben and Bob were discussing "the early start to-morrow." Both were looking forward to the ensuing morning to an event in which they were especially interested. It was to be a free-for-all occasion. Bob had persuaded Mr. Davis to allow them to use the *Flyer,* in fact Bob and Ben had made several experimental flights that afternoon. It had ended in Ben making a suggestion which set his impulsive chum on fire with expectancy and enthusiasm.

"Keep it to yourself, Ben," directed Bob, as they went to their quarters for the night. "We'll show these aviator-fellows some fancy work and a novelty feature or two."

"It will be quite a novelty, I think, yes," said Ben. "Don't be too venturesome, though, Bob."

"It's the only way to attract attention and get even a look in at the prize aero meet," declared Bob. "I'm a candidate all right, if they'll give me a show."

Ben made a mysterious visit to town late in the afternoon. He returned in a wagon, the driver of which was directed to deliver a mysterious load at an old unused shed at an unfrequented part of the grounds.

Five o'clock the next morning found Ben and

Bob arrived at this shed in sprightly mood. Hauling two long light packages outside of the structure, they proceeded to unpack them. They brought to light over two dozen cardboard boxes about a foot square. They had no covers, and Ben next brought from the shed a bundle of sticks about five feet long.

"Now then," said Bob, "got the hammer and tacks?"

"Full supply, Bob," replied Ben cheerily.

"All right, you sharpen one end of the sticks, and I'll tack the box on to the end of them."

In less than a half an hour the boys had the boxes open depth upwards mounted on the sticks.

"Now then, to place them," suggested Ben. "This part of the field isn't used much, and we can cover all the space we want."

They proceeded to set the sticks in the ground at regular intervals, covering a space over one half a mile in length and extending two hundred yards from the fence.

"For all the world they look like a lot of bird boxes on a ranch," observed Bob. "Just about the right distance apart."

"Won't somebody disturb them?" inquired Ben.

"Why should anyone do that? Of course this queer layout will attract attention. No one will meddle with our little stations, though, for they will know they must be an equipment for some new experiments."

The night watchman came forward to meet the boys as Ben emerged from the shed, a bag slung across his shoulders.

The officer leaned perplexedly on his cane and stood staring wonderingly at the singular outlay of boxes.

"Hello, Mr. Brown," hailed Bob heartily. "Thought you had gone home, and we were stealing a march on you."

"I'm waiting to be relieved by the day man. He's a little late on duty," explained the watchman. "What's those boxes?"

"Oh, a big new idea, Mr. Brown," declared Bob, with a mysterious air.

"No mischief, I hope?"

"Mischief?" repeated Bob with great gravity. "I should say not. If Ben and I don't tumble out of the airship, those boxes will comprise a very original and remarkable experiment in the aviation line."

"That so?" muttered the watchman in a puzzled way.

"Yes, sir. Say, Mr. Brown, won't you speak to the day man and have him keep a sort of watch over the boxes here, so that nobody meddles with them?"

"I will, if you'll tell me what you're up to along with them."

"That's a bargain—listen," said Bob.

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"Aha!" exclaimed the watchman, as Bob whispered in his ear. "Well, you are two originals, and no mistake! I'll tell my partner."

"And keep it a secret until the event comes off?"

"Oh, sure—but what will he tell the fellows who will be snooking around here wanting to know what it all means?"

"Why," said Bob, "just say—stunts."

"But they will want to know what kind of stunts."

"All right," replied Bob Dallow airily, "tell them we're going to make some bomb dropping experiments."

CHAPTER IX

A BOMB-DROPPING EVENT

"I SAY, Davis, have you got anything to do with that queer layout yonder?"

"Dallow and Hardy have, I think."

"What's the stunt?"

"You'll have to ask them."

The questioner was named Burr Rollins, and he was the one aviator on the field for whom neither Mr. Davis, Bob nor Ben, nor in fact anybody else at the meet, had much use.

The only merit about the man was that he was unquestionably a fair aeronaut. He had a small, but good machine, and he knew how to handle it. He was surly, suspicious, and on occasions an ugly customer, quick to resent fancied wrong, and harboring resentment in a vicious and sometimes dangerous way when any one crossed his path.

He considered John Davis to be the big stumbling block in his career. This was because the old aviator, through his cool, courageous ways generally

discounted his brilliant but erratic flights with a coherent record.

"Rollins hates me because I have beaten him in the test flights," Mr. Davis had observed to Ben and Bob one day. "He is afraid of me, though, because he knows I am right. I am holding him up to a fair, square-dealing programme. He doesn't altogether like that, for he is a resourceful man, and full of slippery tricks. I've made him respect me, though, and some day he may learn to drop those grouches of his and act like a civilized being."

"That helper of his, the young fellow he calls Dick, is about as gruff a customer as you meet," Bob had observed. "Ever run up against him, Ben?"

"No, I have noticed him practicing at a distance, and thought he did pretty well."

"There he goes now."

"Eh, that boy?" exclaimed Ben, with a stare. "Oh, I know him by sight. Why that is Dick Farrell. He's a cousin of Dave Shallock."

"You mean the fellow you had some trouble with, the son of the engineer who was discharged from the Saxton Automobile Works."

"Yes," assented Ben, with a lively memory of the fellow on the fence the night he had last met Dave Shallock.

"You told me about him," said Bob. "Look out

for this fellow, if he's like that ill-natured cousin of his."

Now, just as the various bird-men about the field were preparing for practice ascents and stunts, Rollins, after his unsatisfactory query from Mr. Davis, stood glumly watching Ben and Bob who had got aboard the machine.

"Let her go!" shouted Ben, and Mr. Davis lent a hand in sending the wheels spinning, and then at the end of a little run the *Flyer* made a graceful lateral soar, and struck a fair equilibrium about two hundred and fifty feet from the ground.

Bob was strapped to the operator's seat, hands, feet and eyes doing just the right thing at the right moment. Ben sat three feet behind him, slightly to one side. The machine was constructed to accommodate several passengers and was delicately framed as to nicety of balance.

"Got the bag all right, Ben?" shot back Bob, as the monoplane, after describing a dizzying circle that made Ben hold his breath, turned its planes upward and shot into the air to a still higher level.

"Right in my lap."

"Have it ready."

"There goes the opening gun for the beginning of the endurance tests on the spiral trials."

"We'll do our own stunt on that after the crowd get through," advised Bob. "We'll just do a bit of floating for the present."

Ben had never been so happy and elated in his life. It was a glorious experience, that of the ensuing sixty minutes. The atmosphere was just right for safe sailing. There were no sudden gusts of air, no strong cross currents. Bob kept the *Flyer* on a course of magnificent long sweeps, several times circling the aviation field.

Thus it was easy for both boys to become comfortable spectators of what was going on, surveying the various airships in all their spectacular maneuvres from a superior height.

"A regular private box party, aren't we?" chuckled Bob.

"It's wonderful," assented his entranced companion. "There goes the *Torpedo*."

"Yes, and that Dick Farrell is aboard."

"He knows how to whiz."

"Whew! That's about all he does know. H'm! that was a narrow graze," commented Bob, as the *Torpedo* nearly collided with a scudding biplane. "Some day that fellow will meet his Waterloo."

After a spell the air began to clear of the exhibitors and their machines.

"Now we'll give Mr. Davis a genuine thrill," announced Bob. "Get ready, Ben."

"I'm all ready, Bob."

The young aviator brought the *Flyer* directly over the field. They were now on a one-thousand-foot level. Bob kept the machine directly over that part

of the enclosure which he and Ben had plotted with their boxes early that morning.

Ben opened the bag in his lap.

"Fire at the warships!" ordered Bob.

"With oranges for bombs," added Ben, displaying the fruit in his lap.

His words let out the secret of the designed exploit. Ben in his studies on aeronautics had found that the deepest scientific interest was evinced in the practicability of using airships in warfare.

What the boys had done that morning was to plot a space to represent the decks of warships. Each box commanded a radius of about three hundred feet. Bob set the motor at its swiftest, and as to height and variation of course followed imitated the probable cautious and expert maneuvres of a real war airship evading the peril of rifle or cannon shots from a genuine enemy below.

Ben poised his bombs with all the accuracy and skill he could command. It was a new and novel exploit in which he had no practice. The constant turnings of the monoplane were confusing, but after the first half dozen of the experiments Ben began to get the knack of poising and dropping the projectiles.

"They didn't all go wild, I think," he said, as the last orange performed its mission.

"We'll get below and see how you have panned

out as to bombardment," said Bob. "I'll try a record on plain aero stunts before we land, Ben."

"Careful, Bob!" warned Ben, as his daring comrade made a sensational dive.

"The spiral dip," announced Bob. "Hold your breath."

"Whew!" ejaculated Ben.

In a whirling top-like series of gyrations, such as Ben had seen a bicycle spin in a crack trick display, Bob manipulated the *Flyer*. It described a perfect spiral effect for nearly eight hundred feet. Then with a sharp veer the machine turned its planes and shot upwards. A second venturesome figure eight followed. Amid a tremendous ovation from the spellbound crowd, the *Flyer* struck on its wheels, bounded, rose, dropped again, and slid one hundred yards to a graceful stop.

"You're an artist, Bob," declared Ben enthusiastically, as they climbed from the machine.

The boys proceeded over to that part of the field where they had set the boxes. Mr. Davis was leading a crowd along the line. Two men accompanied him, one carrying a measuring line. The other was making notations on a tab of paper.

The old aviator waved his hand at his young assistants in a cheering fashion as they reached the last box.

"Well, boys, you did finely in your bomb-dropping event," he announced.

"How's that?" inquired Bob.

"Good enough to start a record," was the reply. "Eleven points out of a possible twenty-five. You'll have a column or two in the newspapers for this exploit, Ben Hardy. If I do as well as that myself, Saturday, I'm in for first mention at the convention, sure."

CHAPTER X

A RUSH ORDER

"I'd LIKE to find the man that did that!" stormed John Davis in great rage.

"It wasn't a man—it was a boy," said Ben, but he distinctly said it to himself.

There was trouble at the *Flyer* camp. It had just been discovered. That morning Mr. Davis had joined in the principal feats of the preliminary aviation meet.

It had been a real endurance test and the barograph record was one of the principal features of the event. The *Torpedo* did very well as to speed, but was lacking in the altitude test. When the barographs were removed from the various machines the *Flyer* showed a 6,211-foot record. The *Torpedo* was fourth down in the list.

There never was a glummer, more sullen man than Burr Rollins when the announcement was made. It was pretty conclusive that the *Flyer* would go into the convention the favorite entry for the coming big aero meet.

"There's Saturday left," growled Rollins, as he turned his back on his fellow aviators in a wrathful way.

"I'll beat the *Torpedo* there, too," declared Mr. Davis confidently. "It can run like a whitehead on a straight course, but bungles at the turns. You lads want to keep in trim. There's no saying what the *Flyer* may not want of you at the big event."

Now to sanguine enthusiasm there had come a sudden dampener that had made Ben look blank and Bob gruesome with anxiety. Mr. Davis, ordinarily cheerful and even tempered, went all to pieces.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, after the encouraging victories of the day, the old aviator had decided to visit the hangar that housed the *Flyer,* to look over the machine and oil up and adjust the machinery for the last trial of the meet. A startling discovery greeted the aeronaut and his two young friends.

One of the great claims of the *Flyer* was that it had a double mechanism to the steering apparatus, that admitted of unusually prompt and efficient manipulation in case of striking a sudden change in the air currents. Mr. Davis with a good deal of pride claimed to be responsible for the adaptation—he did not call it an invention.

This essential and precious part of the mechanism of the *Flyer* was found unlocked from its bear-

ings. Its inner rim of babbitt metal had been chiselled out of place, and the main part of the device had been broken squarely in two as if from the blows of a sledge hammer.

"It's easy to guess why this was done," remarked Bob Dallow hotly.

"Yes," assented Mr. Davis, pale and excited, "this is foul play, the work of an enemy."

He glanced at the boys in turn in a significant way, but did not voice his suspicions. All hands thought instantly of Burr Rollins.

"Well, if we found the culprit, and convicted him and tarred and feathered him into the bargain and drove him out of the camp and the profession, it wouldn't mend the *Flyer,*" observed the old aviator, with a disconsolate look at his beloved machine. "It's all up for me for to-morrow's flight, lads."

"Don't say that, Mr. Davis!" cried Bob, almost at the point of tears. "Surely it can be repaired."

"I don't know how," dissented the aviator. "That fixing was made from a special model. It took a week to make it, and the mechanic who assisted me in its construction is five hundred miles away."

"Let me look at it, please," suggested Ben, and he went over the broken parts of the device critically.

"Mr. Davis," he said, "I don't want to hold out any false hopes, but if anything can be done towards fixing this I know the way."

"You think it can be repaired?"

"Or replaced—yes, sir."

"Within twelve hours?" pressed the aviator anxiously. "Remember, time is the main point in this difficulty."

"Yes, I know that," assented Ben, studying the device. "I think my father can help you out."

"But the place where he works will be shut down by the time you reach Woodville."

"You had better let me try what I can do, Mr. Davis," said Ben.

"If you can replace that joint, Ben," said the aviator, "I will stand any expense and never forget the favor."

"It shall not cost you a cent, and it will make me a happy boy if I can get back in time with the article."

Mr. Davis consulted a timetable. He looked disappointed.

"No train moving Woodville way for four hours," he reported.

"Oh, I can fix that," declared Ben.

He wrapped up the pieces of the broken part and stowed them in two parcels in his pockets. Then he said:

"I will be back by eight o'clock in the morning, Mr. Davis, or send you a telegram."

"You'll be back," predicted Bob Dallow animatedly. "You're starting out right to make a go of it, I can see that."

"Come on, Bob," directed Ben. "Don't worry, Mr. Davis. Everything shall be done that can be done."

"I believe that, Ben," said the aviator warmly.

"What's the programme?" inquired Bob, as Ben led the way from the Davis camp over to a neighboring one.

"I am going to ask that friendly young fellow of Barton's to loan me his motor-cycle."

"Grand idea!" applauded Bob. "He's an accommodating boy, and will be glad to help you through."

Ten minutes later Ben was chug—chugging his way from Blairville down a fine country road in the direction of Woodville.

"I won't tell Mr. Davis of my discovery until after to-morrow's event is over," soliloquized Ben. "I'll have to give him a warning, though. Of course, that ill-natured Rollins is behind this plot to disable the *Flyer*. Dick Farrell did the work for him, though."

Ben had good reasons for this decision. Immediately after the discovery of the disabled monoplane, Ben had noticed a piece of paper lying under the machine. It was all greasy and crinkled. Ben, inspecting this, found it covered with writing. It was a letter from Dave Shallock at Woodville to Dick Farrell at the aero field. The latter had used it to wipe the grease from his hands after his manipulation of the monoplane machinery.

Ben rode into the yard at home just as his father and mother were sitting down to supper. He was covered with dust and pretty well tired out from his rapid run. He received a royally glad welcome, washed up, and thoroughly enjoyed a home meal once more.

"I have come to have you help me out on something, father," said Ben after supper.

"What is that, my son?" inquired Mr. Hardy.

Ben produced the broken parts of the monoplane mechanism and explained the urgency of the unexpected home visit. His father listened attentively and closely examined the pieces of metal.

"Can you mend it, father?" inquired Ben anxiously.

"It is no easy job," replied Mr. Hardy seriously. "What time did you say you could give me on it?"

"In order to be of any use, it must be at the field by eight o'clock to-morrow morning at the latest," replied Ben.

Mr. Hardy went for his hat and told his wife that he and Ben might not be home until very late.

"If the plant was running, this might be a mere trifle," said Mr. Hardy, as Ben accompanied him in the direction of the Saxton works.

When they arrived at the plant they found the watchman strolling in the shop yards. A few words from Mr. Hardy resulted in his unlocking a side door and letting them into the machine shop. Mr.

Hardy went to the section where there were some small hand lathes. He lit the gas in their vicinity and took off his coat, putting on his working blouse.

As has been indicated, Mr. Hardy was a skilled artisan. The present task, however, was one that fully tested his mettle. Ben watched his patient, painstaking efforts till nearly ten o'clock. He was glad when his father required his assistance at a small portable forge, and later at a lathe propelled by foot and hand power.

"Lay down on the bench yonder, Ben," directed Mr. Hardy about midnight, "and take a little rest."

"Can't I help you, father?" inquired Ben.

"Nothing now, Ben," replied Mr. Hardy. "It will take me several hours to finish up this piece of work, and you will have a long day before you."

Daylight was streaming through the windows of the machine shop when Ben opened his eyes. His father was standing at the bench inspecting the result of his long labors. He looked quite white and wearied. For all that, Ben read in his face the satisfaction of work successfully accomplished.

"Did you make it, father?" he inquired, springing to his feet.

"Yes, Ben. I would advise, however, that Mr. Davis have a new bearing made soon. This will answer for a time, but it is only a patched-up makeshift."

The device was bundled up. Ben accompanied

his father home, and they had a refreshing breakfast. Then Ben got the motor-cycle in shape for the return trip to the aviation field.

"You are the best father ever lived!" declared the boy, as he strapped the little piece of machinery to the cycle.

"That's worth something—coming from a bright, active young fellow like you," smiled Mr. Hardy in reply.

"And the smartest man in the bargain!" added Ben.

"We'll try some of it, then, on that wonderful monoplane you are going to build, Ben," said his father.

Ben reached the aviation grounds before eight o'clock. He received a rousing greeting from Mr. Davis. He had the satisfaction of seeing the *Flyer* make its record flight of the season two hours later.

"Remember, Ben," said the aviator that afternoon, as Ben bade him good-bye and started for the train with Bob Dallow, "you are to come to the big meet the last of the month."

"I'll be there," declared Ben animatedly, "and I'll be there with a new airship that I am going to build myself."

"Good luck to you, Ben!" encouraged the old aviator.

CHAPTER XI

THE DART

"Well, Ben, how is your airship work coming on?"

"Famously, father."

"That's good. Here is a drawing of the new curve planes we talked about last night. We have a whole afternoon before us, and I would like to look over things."

"I will be glad to have you," declared Ben. "I know you can make some valuable suggestions."

Bright and early the Monday morning after his return from the aero meet, Ben had set at work to build his airship. He was not daunted by the thought that the same was a big undertaking for a boy. Mr. Davis told him that it was an easy thing to do, if a person knew how to do it and started about it right.

In his father Ben found a skilled and willing helper. Mr. Hardy was slow and cautious about entering upon any work he did not thoroughly understand. He was more at home with automo-

biles than airships, and not inclined to move from a groove with which he was thoroughly familiar into one that was so far purely speculative for him. His desire to encourage Ben, however, impelled him to take a deep interest in the efforts of his son. Before he had given his thoughts two days to the fascinating new field, the expert mechanician found himself quite as enthusiastic as his son over the proposition, although he was not as demonstrative as Ben.

A large shed on the Hardy property had always been a home workshop for the master machinist. It was well stored with tools, and it was here that Mr. Hardy had produced many of his automobile inventions. During the absence of Ben at the aero meet, he had fenced in with a screen wire a space over fifty feet wide adjoining the shed. Here a scaffolding, a light lifting crane, and work horses had been set to accommodate the worker. Ben started in at his experimental task with all necessary accessories for prosecuting his labors.

The Saturday afternoon of that week his father had come home from work at one o'clock. He looked and felt as brisk and lively as a boy just out of school as he joined Ben in the work yard.

Ben's airship had begun to assume definite form and substance. The motor part of the machine did not trouble our hero at all. He knew that appurtenance when it was needed would be the latest and

best devised that his father could select. The framework of wood and canvas was what tested Ben's skill.

Mr. Hardy had helped him in making the drawings of the machine before he had commenced work on it. Every morning he laid out specific work for the day and every evening he critically inspected it.

"Well, father," observed Ben, after studying over the new drawings, "the *Dart* begins to look like something, doesn't it?"

"The *Dart,* eh?" smiled Mr. Hardy, "so you have chosen that name?"

"Yes, I thought it quite appropriate. My first ambition is high sailing. Mr. Davis won on that, and even the the *Flyer* did not make such a very high flight. I believe with a fair machine specially built I can beat his record."

"All right, Ben," remarked Mr. Hardy, "we will continue on our model. If I had foreseen how this line of work was going to interest me, however, and had realized the practical possibilities of the construction, I should have recommended a larger model."

"We will try the *Dart* first. If she makes a go of it, we can try something more ambitious."

Father and son were employed in the congenial work in a pleasant progressive way all the afternoon. Ben had never been so happy in his life, and the

"BUILDING AN AIRSHIP, ARE YOU, HARDY?"

novel labor acted as a restful variation for his father.

It was about five o'clock when Ben, holding a skeleton frame on a curving slant while Mr. Hardy covered it with canvas, chanced to glance towards the street.

"Father, some one is coming," he said in a significant tone.

"Who is it, Ben?"

"Mr. Saxton."

"Indeed," observed Mr. Hardy. He did not discontinue his work, but securing it so the canvas would not give, then looked up to greet his unexpected visitor.

The proprietor of the automobile works, portly, overdressed, and swelling with a sense of his own importance, did not look pleased or agreeable as he approached the work yard and passed in through its open gateway.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Saxton," observed Ben, while his father bowed courteously.

"H'm," observed Jasper Saxton in a dry non-committal tone, curiously scanning the skeleton of the monoplane, "building an airship, are you, Hardy?"

"Trying to," answered Ben's father.

"Something new?"

"Father couldn't make anything without striking some improvements," remarked Ben.

He spoke pleasantly, but all the same to give the wealthy manufacturer a hint along the line of his notorious indifference to the past valuable services of his head machinist.

"Think there's something to it, do you, Hardy?" inquired Saxton.

"How do you mean?" asked Mr. Hardy.

"Well, along practical lines. Is the aviation fever only a spurt, or is it going to be a real feature?"

"In the manufacturing line, you mean." inquired Mr. Hardy.

"That's it."

"Well, the Diebold people over at Martinville are making and selling some machines. They are thinking of stocking up with duplicate parts. There will of course be a good deal of supply trade, even if the thing runs only as a fad."

"I hadn't heard of that," remarked Mr. Saxton in a thoughtful, speculative way. "Something to it, is there?"

"I think so."

"Worth specializing as a department?"

"You would have to decide that, Mr. Saxton," replied Mr. Hardy. "I couldn't venture an opinion."

"You appear to think enough of it to give your time to experimenting, it seems," said the manufacturer. "I don't want to get behind in the procession, you know. If we could work into the air-

ship business in our dull months, it might become quite a profitable feature of the business."

Mr. Saxton went all around the framework on the wooden horses, and inspected every part of the skeleton machine. He asked many questions. Especially was he interested, when Mr. Hardy with the natural eloquence of an inventor explained some new features of the *Dart.*

Then the manufacturer strolled to one side in a thoughtful way. He took out a pencil and a card and did some figuring.

"See here, Hardy," he said at length, "I've decided to give this airship business a try. We'll just move this model down to the plant where we'll have everything handy, and you can put in a week or two seeing how the proposition pans out."

CHAPTER XII

A SERIOUS CHARGE

BEN had never been more astonished in his life than he was now at the amazing words of the proprietor of the Saxton Automobile Works. As to Mr. Hardy, he gave a start and stared blankly at his employer.

"What was that you said, sir?" he demanded, and Ben detected a latent fire in his father's eye that was not usually there. Dense and thick-skinned as Jasper Saxton was, he could not fail to realize that his bulldozing methods had exceeded the limit in the present instance. He failed to meet Mr. Hardy's fixed, challenging glance.

"Why—er—you see, Hardy, this thing has gone pretty far, you know."

"What thing?" demanded Mr. Hardy.

"This airship work."

"And you expect me to turn in the *Dart* here to your works?"

"That's it, Hardy."

"Well, Mr. Saxton, it can't be done."

"Why not?"

"Because it belongs to my son here, Ben."

"Rot! rubbish!" flared up Jasper Saxton, his face getting red, his eyes exhibiting the ugly mood that always surged to the surface when any one dared to cross his plans. "No subterfuge, now, Hardy, no subterfuge."

"I think you have generally found me a truthful, plain-spoken man," said Mr. Hardy with dignity. "This airship is the property of my son exclusively."

"Yes, and I'd have you know that your time and the material you are using here are my property!" shouted Mr. Saxton, lashing around with his cane. "See here, Hardy, I buy your work and ability for a price, and I'll have no man robbing me of my just dues. I can get you in trouble—yes, I can," continued the narrow-minded manufacturer recklessly. "I've let you have your swing and said nothing, but now it's got to stop."

"What has got to stop?"

"You used my shop one whole night, gas, machines, material, on a side job for some pet of your boy there up at the aero field. Oh, I know all about it. My watchman told me."

"And I told him to do so, and further, mentioned it to your bookkeeper, and instructed him to charge me for it, if there was any charge to make. I think, though, it's pretty small business, Mr. Saxton, when

a trifling accommodation like that is refused to an old and faithful employee."

"We'll let that pass. There are other things," muttered Jasper Saxton. "You install my airship department, and I'll see that the patents are duly protected."

"Yes, you certainly know how to protect patents," remarked Mr. Hardy meaningly. "All the same, sir, this special machine, the *Dart,* belongs to my son, Ben, and can't be included in any bargain you and I may make."

"Humbug! It's got to," insisted the manufacturer in his usual domineering fashion. "I don't want to make you trouble, Hardy—I don't want to be hard on you."

"About what?" demanded Mr. Hardy vaguely.

"Oh, about a number of things. You are using tools and materials here that belong to me."

"For which I shall pay you."

"You have taken the run of my shop, and some people say that there have been a lot of parts stolen from the plant. I know there is a lot of stuff missing."

Mr. Hardy's face took an expression that Ben had never seen there before. He advanced straight up to his malicious employer, his eyes blazing with indignation and scorn.

"Do you mean to intimate that I am a thief?" he demanded.

"I am not saying," observed Jasper Saxton, wilting, but his mean soul showing in its true colors.

"Shame!" cried Ben, wrought up indescribably. "Don't do it, father!"

Quick as a flash Ben sprang forward to arrest the descending arm of his father. Had he not done so, Jasper Saxton would have measured his length on the ground. As it was, he dodged out of the way, white and scared.

"You are right, Ben," spoke Mr. Hardy in a husky tone, but controlling his emotion. "Mr. Saxton, my boy has said it: Shame on you—I will thank you to leave these premises."

"Take care! take care!" growled the manufacturer threateningly.

"I'll leave your employ."

"You'll have a bill to settle first, mind that."

"And you, too—a big one," retorted Mr. Hardy, rousing up again. "I serve you notice, sir—I shall sue you for my inventions on the Estrelle automobile just as soon as I can place the matter in the hands of a lawyer."

"You will, eh?" fairly howled Jasper Saxton, becoming furious. "Try it, try it! Why, I can ruin you. I'll show you."

"You had better go away from here," advised Ben, putting himself before the manufacturer to shield his father from further insult.

Jasper Saxton departed, threatening and gesticu-

lating furiously. Ben restrained himself from saying some pretty bitter things. As the manufacturer disappeared, he turned to his father with an anxious, sorrowful face.

"Oh, father!" he exclaimed, "what have we done?"

Mr. Hardy sighed. Then his face broke into a smile of deep relief, as though a heavy load had been removed from his mind, and he said:

"The best thing in the world, my son, and it ought to have been done long ago."

"But you have given up your position at the Saxton plant?"

"Was it much of a position, Ben, with the knowledge in my mind all the time that I was being robbed by that man? I haven't said much, Ben, but I have been thinking a good deal since you told me about the threat that Dave Shallock made."

"I am glad of it, father."

"Then do not worry about my prompt action. I had intended to make a last demand on Saxton for my rights in those patents."

"It would have been no use," declared Ben rather gloomily.

"I realized that, too. His behavior just now has only hastened my decision. Do you think any self-respecting man could remain in Saxton's employ after his accusations?"

"But you are no thief, father."

"No one knows that better than Saxton. He was trying to bluff and frighten me. My record is open to the world, so his threats fall harmless. To think of his ingratitude after you saved his plant from destruction!"

"I believe that Tom Shallock has some hold on Saxton," said Ben. "Maybe they are in a plot together to get you into trouble. Perhaps Saxton thinks if he can discredit you, it will help in denying that you had any claim on those automobile patents."

"It is unfortunate that I lost that memorandum that he gave me. That would prove my right to half the patents."

"You mean stolen from you," declared Ben, and he recalled the conversation he had overheard between Tom Shallock and the stranger who had outdistanced him in the light gig. "Father, you remember that man I told you about who demanded money he had loaned to Tom Shallock?"

"Yes," nodded Mr. Hardy.

"I should know him again. I am going to make it my business to find that man."

"What good will that do, Ben?" asked his father.

"I am satisfied that he could tell a whole lot about Shallock. Maybe about that stolen contract, too."

The visit of the conscienceless manufacturer had put rather a dismal end to a pleasant afternoon for father and son. Mr. Hardy took it quietly as was

his wont, but his wife was much agitated when the circumstances were related to her.

"What are you going to do?" she inquired.

"Well, first of all, I am going to help Ben complete his airship—a good airship," declared Mr. Hardy emphatically. "The next thing I am going to do is to place this patent litigation in the hands of a capable lawyer. I might later go into building air machines as a regular business for myself. It will take time to find out if that is best. In the meanwhile I shall apply for a position with the Diebold Company up at Martinsville!"

"Why, they wanted you last year, didn't they, father?" asked Ben.

"Yes, and I feel sure they will want me now."

"But that is so far from home," suggested Mrs. Hardy anxiously.

"Only three miles. I can go to and come from my work on a bicycle, and the exercise will be the best thing in the world for me," declared Mr. Hardy.

Ben did a good deal of hard thinking after he went to bed. He had an uneasy feeling that some plot was working against his father's good name.

Monday morning a neighbor told Mrs. Hardy that she had got out of bed to close a window during the night, and had seen a man with a lantern looking over the flying machine in the work yard. As she let down the window the noise disturbed the night

prowler, and he extinguished the lantern and skulked away.

Two nights later, about eleven o'clock, Ben roused up from his sleep to find his mother shaking him gently.

"Ben! Ben!" she whispered in a quick tone of alarm, "get up at once."

"What is the matter, mother?" asked Ben excitedly.

"A man with a bag over his shoulder just went through the yard into the work shed," was Mrs. Hardy's startling announcement.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN IN THE GIG

BEN instantly thought of the mysterious visitor reported by their neighbor a few evenings previous. He hurriedly slipped on a few clothes and was down the front stairs in three jumps.

"Be careful, Ben," Mr. Hardy called after him, also aroused by Mrs. Hardy, and getting ready to join his son in a search for the intruder in the yard below.

Ben unlocked the rear door and rushed out into the yard. As he passed the back porch he grabbed up the end of a hard wood hoe handle, broken off short and used by Mrs. Hardy to brace the screen door.

Ben's first glance was toward his beloved flying machine. He was immensely relieved to discover no one near it. Apparently it had not been disturbed. The gate of the work yard stood open, and also the door of the work shed. With a spring Ben pushed this door shut, slipped the heavy latch, and

standing on guard armed with the hoe handle awaited the arrival of his father.

Mrs. Hardy had lit a lamp and set it in the rear window upstairs, so that its rays might throw an illumination over the yard. When Mr. Hardy appeared he carried the lighted cellar lantern.

"Where is the trespasser, Ben?" he inquired.

"In there, if anywhere," said Ben, tapping lightly on the shed door with the end of his club. "Mother says she saw a man go into the shed."

Mr. Hardy undid the catch while Ben stood ready for assault or defence. His father had the lantern beyond the open doorway, and in his usual mild and inoffensive way inquired:

"Is anybody there?"

"There doesn't seem to be," said Ben, peering past his father as there was no response to the challenge.

Both entered the shed. They could not discover the slightest indication that there had been any trespasser in evidence since they had last visited the place, earlier in the evening. Everything was in its accustomed place. Ben took the lantern and flashed its rays in all the remote cluttered-up corners of the structure.

"A false alarm, I guess," he reported finally.

"But your mother is positive that she saw a man enter the shed," suggested Mr. Hardy.

"Then it was some wandering tramp," decided

Ben, "and he slipped out while I was getting down stairs. At all events, nothing appears to have been disturbed or taken."

They closed up the shed and returned to the house. Ben drew his bed up close to the window of his room, to command a good view of the rear yard. He watched without results for nearly two hours and then fell asleep.

"We are having quite a series of midnight alarms," remarked Mr. Hardy at the breakfast table the next morning.

"I hope they don't signify anything of importance," observed Ben. "The man with the lantern the other night, and this latest visitor with a bag over his shoulder, are certainly mysterious."

Ben went out to the shed and looked it over searchingly in the daylight. Nothing was missing, so far as he could discover. As he started to return to the house, however, he paused, stooped over and picked up something from the floor.

It was an unfamiliar object about the size of a big breastpin. It resembled a badge, for at the back of it was a hinged pin and a snap catch to hold the pin in place. The front of the device consisted of a dozen criss-cross alternate threads of copper and silver. These were of wavy formation and resembled spider's legs.

"How did this ever get here?" ruminated Ben. "It wasn't here yesterday afternoon, for it is too

conspicuous to miss. Maybe our midnight visitor with the bag dropped it."

"Now then, for a good day's work," said Mr. Hardy briskly, appearing on the scene.

"Father, do you suppose some one is trying to get us into trouble?"

"Who, for instance?"

"Well, Mr. Saxton."

"Why should he? No, he will not disturb me as long as I keep quiet about that suit on the patents."

"I don't like these mysterious night callers," said Ben.

"They haven't done us any harm yet."

"But they may. Some one did visit the work shed last night."

"How do you know that?"

Ben showed the strange pin he had found, and told his suspicions.

"You mustn't let these things bother you, Ben," advised his father sensibly. "No harm has been done to our machine as yet. I intend to lay a wire around the yard connected with a bell in the house, that will alarm us if anybody comes near the work shed."

"That is a good idea," said Ben.

They were so interested in their mutual work till noon, that both for the time being forgot their suspicions and fears.

"I'll have to ask you to do an errand for me, Ben?" said Mr. Hardy after dinner.

"What is that, father?"

"I need some headless screws of a certain pattern. None of the hardware stores in town keep them. I won't ask any favors of the Saxton people."

"No, no, don't be under any obligations to Mr. Saxton, father."

"I think you can get the screws from the Diebold works. At any rate, you see my friend, John Earle, the superintendent at Martinsville, and tell him what I want. If he hasn't got them, he can probably tell you where you can get them."

Mr. Hardy gave Ben a sample of what he wanted. Ben started on foot for Martinsville. He reached the Diebold plant and was received in a friendly fashion by the superintendent. Mr. Earle asked about his father. He drew enough out of Ben to guess that there was some trouble at the Saxton works. He told Ben to inform his father that he was coming over to Woodville to see him in a day or two.

"As to the screws, we haven't got the size," explained the superintendent. "I am sure you can get those at Satterly's shop, in Auburndale. Our wagon is going there in a few minutes, and you can ride over."

"Thank you, Mr. Earle," said Ben, and ten minutes afterward he was posted on the seat of the

factory wagon beside the driver. It was six miles to Auburndale. Ben planned to return to Woodville by the railroad.

Satterly's was a carriage shop, and Ben found what he wanted there. He made an inquiry as to trains, and learned that one would pass for Woodville in about half an hour.

He strolled leisurely towards the depot, the screws in his pocket, and was turning a street corner when a vehicle going at a good stiff pace passed him.

It flashed by him quickly, but not until its driver was seen and recognized by Ben.

"Hello!" exclaimed Ben. "That's the man I saw talking with Tom Shallock in Woodville—the man I am looking for!"

The next moment Ben changed his course, darting down the street in hot pursuit of the man in the gig.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTERIOUS PIN

"That man has got a mighty good horse," was Ben's comment, as he sped down the street.

On the former occasion, when Ben had seen the man in Woodville, the horse had sprinted up at a touch. Now the animal trotted along at a still better pace.

"I can never overtake him on foot," thought our hero, "I mustn't lose sight of this man till I find out who he is and where he lives."

The gig was rapidly outdistancing Ben. As it rounded a corner out of sight, the lad was wrought up to an intense pitch of desperation.

Then a wild impulse sent him to the curb where a horse attached to a light buggy was standing. Ben made a reckless decision and acted promptly on its suggestions.

The horse was not hitched. Ben reached the buggy seat in a spring and seized lines and whip with a vigorous:

"Get up!"

A yell of startled dismay rang out behind him. Ben fancied that it came from the owner of the horse, probably observing the theft of his rig as he came out from some store where he had been trading. Ben never looked back. He paid no attention to other shouts at the rear.

"There he goes," said Ben, as he turned the corner. The gig was two squares in advance. It turned into a new street, and our hero followed. There were other turns, and finally the gig was halted in front of a store. Its driver drew up to the curb, sprang out of the gig and disappeared inside the establishment.

Ben drove slowly past the place. He observed that it was a store given over to the sale of second-hand tools. Its windows were so smoked, and grimed, and choked up with so much miscellaneous plunder, that he could not see the inside of the place.

"I've housed my man," uttered Ben with satisfaction. "He may not live here, but he certainly is known here. That is enough for the present. Now to return this rig."

It suddenly occurred to Ben that he had acted on a decidedly reckless impulse. He realized that it might lead to serious results. He somewhat anxiously urged up the horse.

"I must get back to the place I started from and make an explanation," he decided.

"Whoa!" came the stern mandate, as Ben turned into the street where he had appropriated the rig.

A police officer had suddenly run out into the street, and halting in front of the horse, waved his arms strenuously. The animal paused and reared, and Ben was nearly thrown from his seat.

"Looking for you," remarked the officer, gazing sternly at Ben. "Horse thief, eh?"

"Oh, dear no!" smiled Ben.

"You stole this rig."

"No, I only took it—in fact, borrowed it for a few minutes."

"That don't go down," observed the officer.

"Why you find me getting back to the place where I found the rig, quick as I can, don't you?" challenged Ben.

The officer got up into the seat and ordered Ben to drive to the police station. Ben was annoyed, and a trifle anxious. They had not proceeded more than two squares, however, when they met the seeming owner of the rig coming towards them.

"I've got him," announced the officer.

"See you have," nodded the man brusquely, looking over the horse. "You're a fine young jailbird, aren't you?" he hailed Ben.

"I am not what you think, mister," declared the boy quietly. "My name is Ben Hardy, I live at Woodville, and everybody knows I am an honest boy."

"You haven't shown it at Auburndale," observed the officer.

"Let me explain, please," said Ben to the owner of the rig. "There is a man I have been looking for these past ten days. I ran across him here driving a fast horse. The only way I could follow him was by borrowing your rig."

The owner of the vehicle looked Ben over critically. Our hero did not flinch from his penetrating glance.

"I came back soon as I could, as you see," proceeded Ben. "Now then, what's your bill?"

"My bill?" repeated the man in a surprised way.

"Certainly. I've put you out and had the use of your rig."

"I guess he's a pretty good boy. He seems to be telling the truth," here remarked the officer.

"Then I shan't charge him a cent."

"And don't try any more such tricks," advised the officer. "You may not get off so easy the next time."

"You're gentlemen, both of you," declared Ben, glad enough that he had escaped delay and embarrassment.

Our hero debated for sometime as to his wisest course of progress. His father was in no special hurry for the screws. The trail of the man he had traced to the second-hand shop was fresh. Ben felt sure that the man in the gig knew a good deal that

might be of value to his father in his dealings with Saxton.

"I'll take another look at that store, anyhow," concluded Ben, and a brisk walk soon brought him into its vicinity.

"The gig is gone, so the driver is probably not in the place," he decided.

Ben walked slowly past the store. He glanced in at the open door. A rough looking, poorly dressed man was sorting over some tools. Ben saw no one else in the place.

"I'll make a bold break," he reflected, and entered the store.

"What do you want?" demanded the apparent proprietor of the place, turning around at the sound of intruding footsteps.

"Why, I was looking for some one, mister."

"Well, who is it?"

"A man drove up here in a gig about half an hour ago. I want to see him."

"What about?"

"Business."

"What kind of business?" persisted the man.

"I'll tell him. If you will give me his address, I will be very much obliged to you."

The man shook his head strenuously. He regarded Ben as though he considered him an enemy and a spy.

"That won't wash," he said, "and you had better

get out of here. People who have any business with the man you are talking about, know just where to find him, without coming snooking around here the way you do."

Ben backed away. The man looked positively menacing now as he glared at his visitor. Ben was shrewd enough that this place was one operated under tactics of caution and evasiveness.

"Hello!" he exclaimed suddenly, and came to a staring standstill.

"Hello, what?" demanded the man suspiciously, edging between Ben and the door.

"Oh, nothing," said Ben, recovering himself.

"Yes, there was."

Ben moved from foot to foot, sizing up the situation. The cause of his sharp ejaculation was the discovery on his part of an odd looking pin or badge on the lapel of the man's coat.

It was an exact counterpart of the one Ben had found in the work shed at home. Our hero reflected rapidly. Then, without attracting the attention of the man to what he was doing, he turned sideways. He got the pin out of his pocket and managed to attach it to his coat. Then he faced the man.

"Aha!" exclaimed the second-hand dealer, fixing his eyes on the pin.

CHAPTER XV

A MEAN ENEMY

BEN saw at once that the sight of the pin had produced a great effect on the second-hand dealer. He prepared to take advantage of it.

"Why didn't you say so at first?" inquired the store keeper.

"Say what?" inquired Ben.

The man pointed significantly to the pin that corresponded to the one on the lapel of his own coat.

"You must be one of the boys from Woodville," he observed.

"That's where I live."

"Then you know Knippel?"

"Oh," said Ben to himself, "I've found out his name, have I?" and he said aloud: "I've seen him before to-day, yes."

"What do you want to see him for?" inquired the man curiously. "Say, see here, if you've got something to sell, you know it's all one dealing with me."

"All right, when I do I'll come to you. I don't want to sell anything to Mr. Knippel."

"What then."

"Other business. You know he loans money once in a while."

"I know he is able to, if he wants to," responded the man. "See here," he continued eagerly, "what would it be if you came to me again. Not railroad stuff, you know?"

"Certainly not," answered Ben accommodatingly.

"Too dangerous. Prime stuff is machine shop plunder. Especially brass and copper. I'd give you a fair deal."

"I'm sure of that," said Ben. "Say, how am I going to get to Knippel?"

"That'll be hit and miss. He makes the rounds, you know. He may not be around here again to collect for a week."

"Where did you say he lived?"

"I didn't say, but it's at Blairville."

"Oh," nodded Ben. He remembered that it was the town near the aero field.

"You take a chance of finding him there," proceeded the man, "he flits about so much. Sometimes he isn't at home once in a month."

"Well, I'll try and locate him somehow, much obliged," said our hero.

"Remember, now, come to me direct when you've got anything to sell."

"All right."

"Especially brass and copper."

"Good enough," said Ben, and left the place.

He walked to the railroad depot reflecting deeply. He had made a pretentious break, a sort of bluff, and had learned what he wanted to know. Ben sturdily believed that the man Knippel knew a great deal that could help his father, and now he knew where to find him.

"The way I size it up," ruminated Ben, "is that this Knippel has a lot of people in various manufacturing towns around here stealing things and selling to him and his agents. This pin shows membership in the gang. Some one dropped it in the work shed. Who was it? Well, I've got my start on this business, and I'm going to work something tangible out of it."

Ben did not tell his father of his latest experience when he reached home. In fact, he did not even then deliver to him the screws for which he had been sent.

To his surprise he found the work yard deserted. As he passed it, a queer, indefinable sensation of something being out of place assailed him. Ben paused to figure out what it was. Then he noticed that the airship skeleton was partly dismantled and some of its parts gone.

"Father, father, are you there?" he called to-

wards the work shed. There was no reply. Ben hurried towards the house. It was untenanted, but coming out on the porch he came upon his mother. She was standing looking down the street, anxious faced and in tears.

"Why, mother, what is the matter?" exclaimed Ben in great surprise.

"Oh, my son, trouble," responded Mrs. Hardy in a broken tone of voice.

"Father——"

"Has gone down town in urgent haste. Mr. Saxton is at the bottom of it all."

"How—explain, mother."

"It was directly after you went away this morning. Two constables appeared with what they called writs of some kind. It seems that Mr. Saxton claimed that a great deal of valuable automobile parts have been missing from the plant for over a year. The officers searched the work shed."

"The villain!" fired up Ben hotly. "Did he dare to accuse father of stealing?"

"It seems so," sighed Mrs. Hardy. "The astonishing thing is that in a corner of the shed behind that barrel in which you keep odds and ends, they found nearly a bushel of carburetor parts."

"Then they put them there!" cried Ben. "Ah, I understand now. The man you saw with the bag is in the conspiracy to disgrace father. His errand

was to place its contents where they would incriminate us. He dumped them out and escaped before I got into the yard."

"The men then proceeded to take the metal parts from the airship," resumed Mrs. Hardy.

"Why, those never came from the Saxton plant!" exclaimed Ben. "Father made them right here in the work shed."

"Your father protested, but the officers claimed they were acting under sanction of the law. They told him he had his redress, and could replevin them, I think it was, if he could prove ownership."

"Where is father now?"

"He hurried down town to see his lawyer and try to get back those airship parts."

"I must find him at once," declared Ben. "Mother, this a pretty serious affair."

"It is indeed, Ben."

"It is all a plot, a base, wicked plot!" cried Ben. "Everybody knows that father is the soul of honesty. Mr. Saxton shall suffer for this."

Ben was all on fire with indignation and excitement. He reached the office of Mr. Pearsons, his father's lawyer, breathless and perspiring. It was to find his father pacing the floor in a restless, anxious way.

"Oh, father," exclaimed Ben, "this is terrible!"

"For Saxton, yes," said Mr. Hardy, in his usual

calm and trustful way. "A man who will do what he has done, will wake up with a tormenting conscience some day."

"But what good does that do us now?"

"Don't worry, my son, everything will come out right."

"It's a pretty hard thing to see you charged with stealing."

"They will have to prove those charges, Ben."

"And they have got hold of our new monoplane parts."

"Mr. Pearsons has just gone to see about those," said Mr. Hardy.

The lawyer in question entered the office at that moment. He was in great haste. He looked stirred up and bothered.

Mr. Pearsons nodded to Ben. Then he turned towards his anxious-faced father.

"Well, Hardy," he observed, "we're dealing with a bad crowd, I can tell you."

"You mean Mr. Saxton?"

"And his accomplices and lawyers. The recovery of those automobile parts was only a ruse."

"A ruse?" repeated Mr. Hardy wonderingly.

"Yes."

"How do you mean, Mr. Pearsons?"

"They were really after the parts of that flying machine of yours."

"Why?"

"Well, Hardy," pronounced the lawyer emphatically, "I am satisfied that the motive of this raid is to steal your airship inventions!"

CHAPTER XVI

STEALING AN INVENTION

"Yes," repeated the lawyer, "that Saxton crowd is aiming to steal your airship inventions."

Mr. Hardy sank on a chair looking blank and troubled. Ben spoke up.

"How can they do that, Mr. Pearsons?"

"I'll tell my story, and you will see," replied the lawyer. "I went down to the plant and cornered Saxton in his private office. He looked quite bored at our prompt action. I belong to his set, and, as he realizes, I know some of his business secrets. He began to explain, as he called it. Thousands of dollars worth of stuff had been stolen from the works he claimed. Some had been found at your house. He said he didn't believe your intention was to steal them, that you probably took them to select what you wanted, and would square up later."

"The hypocrite!" commented Ben hotly.

"I faced him right down," went on Mr. Pearsons. "I informed him that it was a pretty dangerous thing to destroy a good man's character off-hand.

He is a man of no real backbone, and I scared him nearly to death. He kept mumbling over that he hoped no harm had been done, that he didn't intend to prosecute. I defied him to do so. I told him if he didn't, we would force the issue and fight him to the last ditch, till we found out which one of his accomplices planted those fittings in your work shed."

"Good—good!" cried Ben.

"Then I demanded the return of your airship parts," continued the lawyer. "He flushed, hemmed and hawed, and looked flustered. Certainly he would return them. Sure he had made a mistake. The clumsy officers had no right to take them. All right, I said, where were they? Saxton said they were in the possession of the constables. If I would send around about four o'clock they would be ready for me. Then I opened up on him, I think I gave him a tongue lashing he will never forget. I told him he was a thoroughly bad man, and I would be obliged if he didn't speak to me when I passed him on the street."

"Mr. Pearsons, you are indeed a true friend," said Mr. Hardy with emotion.

"I know that I am that man's enemy from this time forth," declared the lawyer. "He is a disgrace to the community. As I left his place, I met a fellow named Bogart. I got him out of jail last year, and he has always felt very grateful to me.

He has been doing odd jobs helping the regular constables, and he took me aside and let the cat out of the bag.

"How do you mean?" inquired Mr. Hardy.

"Why, he told me that just as soon as the constable reported to Saxton, he sent two of the airship parts by special messenger to his lawyer. You know who that is—that shrewd, tricky Mason, a man who ought to be disbarred from his unscrupulous methods. My informant said that Mason at once put his office force at work to make drawings of the new parts and get out specifications. They expect to get the papers by special mail to Washington on the two o'clock train."

"It is too bad," said Mr. Hardy gloomily.

"And it is now one o'clock. Is there no way to outwit them?" asked Ben.

"Not in respect to getting ahead of them at Washington," replied Mr. Pearsons, consulting his watch. "See here, Hardy," he continued, approaching the dejected inventor, and placing a friendly, encouraging hand on his shoulder, "don't you be downhearted."

"It is a pretty bad proposition for me," said Ben's father.

"Not altogether. We shall at once follow their claims with our own, and we will fight it through the courts."

"That is a long and tedious process."

"It is our only alternative. You go home, don't worry, and leave this thing to me to untangle. To-morrow come and see me about suing Saxton on those automobile patents. I'm thinking we shall be able to raise a storm about his ears that will keep him awake nights for a spell."

"Will I be able to get the airship parts to-day?" inquired Mr. Hardy.

"I'll attend to that," assured the lawyer.

"I want to get Ben's monoplane done."

Mr. Hardy and Ben left the lawyer's office. As they reached the street, our hero paused. An idea had come into his mind, and he said:

"You go home, father. I'll join you there soon."

"What are you going to do?"

"Oh I've got some little things to attend to about town."

Mr. Hardy proceeded on his way alone. It made Ben sorry and fretted to observe his depressed and downcast air.

"I'll fit things if it takes all I've got," said Ben firmly, and he walked down the street and entered the savings bank where he had deposited most of the money received from the sale of the Sybilline whistle.

Mr. Pearsons was busy at his desk when Ben re-entered the office. He looked up somewhat surprised, with the words:

"Well, what's the trouble, Hardy?"

"My father has gone home very much discouraged," said Ben seriously. "An idea struck me that may change the situation somewhat, so I thought I would come back to see you."

"Very good. What then?" inquired the lawyer.

"Why, just this—a way to get ahead of the Saxton crowd in filing the application for those patents."

The lawyer shook his head, consulting his watch.

"No show, I'm sorry to say," he declared. "It would take fully two hours to prepare the papers. Mason is ahead of us one mail, and no other leaves until to-morrow morning."

"I drew the design of the patents for my father," explained Ben. "In fact, I have the rude draft of them in my pocket now. As to the description, I could write out those to the smallest detail."

"No use now, too late," insisted Mr. Pearsons.

"Let me ask one question, please."

"Certainly, lad."

"Have you a correspondent in Washington?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then I suggest this: Why can't we get up all the necessary formation for applying for the patents, describing them accurately, so they can be reproduced by your correspondent, and sending word for word the specifications, as you call them, and telegraphing them."

The lawyer fairly jumped from his seat.

"Hardy," he said enthusiastically, "you are a

genius!" And then his face shadowed, and he shook his head.

"That would certainly head off the Saxton crowd, and my correspondent at Washington is a bright active man, but—why, Hardy, it would cost at least one hundred dollars to telegraph all that stuff."

"Yes, sir; I suppose so," said Ben quietly, "so I brought the money to pay for it. There is one hundred and fifty dollars."

CHAPTER XVII

ON TIME

THE lawyer sat staring in surprise at the little roll of bills Ben had placed on the desk before him. Then his countenance expanded.

"You have solved the problem, Hardy. You are sure you want to invest all that money?"

"To help my father—I guess so!" replied our hero with energy.

"All right," cried Mr. Pearsons briskly, arising from his chair. "Here sit down at that desk yonder," and he pointed to an inner room. "Now then, you're a smart boy, and I see it. Write out in the most exact detail what you want wired."

"You think your Washington correspondent can follow out instructions explicitly?"

"Oh, I'll guarantee him."

Ben went to the inner office and set to work at once. It was fortunate that he had acted as secretary for his father on occasions similar to the present one. Ben made a rough draft of what he wanted to say, and then he studied and revised it. This took an hour of his time.

When he had copied the description, he felt highly satisfied. He believed that any ordinary draftsman could make drawings of the airship parts from his directions. They made four pages of foolscap.

"Excellent—splendid!" declared Mr. Pearsons, as an hour later he read over Ben's work. "I'll send this to Washington over the wires instanter. I shall also instruct my correspondent to telegraph your father if he completes the matter to-day."

"Thank you, Mr. Pearsons."

"The thanks all belong to you, Hardy," insisted the lawyer, with an admiring glance at Ben. "Any time you feel like taking up with the law, there's a place for you in this office, remember that."

"I'm too full of the airship fever to think of anything like that just now," smiled Ben.

"That's all right, follow your bent as long as it is a legitimate and useful one. I think you can advise your father that we have scooped the enemy on the first move in the game."

Ben had no intention of disclosing his last action to his father, until he was sure that his plan had met with success. He went home and had lunch with his father. They pottered around the work yard for a spell. Then Ben went down town.

It was about five o'clock, and he was on his way homewards again, when he ran up against Caleb Dunn.

"Hold on, there, Ben Hardy," hailed the foreman

at the Saxton Automobile Works. "Just the fellow I wanted to see."

"What about, Mr. Dunn?"

"About your father's affairs. Here, give me all the details of this tangle with Saxton."

Ben realized that the bluff, outspoken foreman was a genuine friend of his father. He began a recital of most of the facts concerning his father's present trouble."

A sort of a subdued growl issued from the lips of the foreman when he had concluded. His face was grim and angry.

"You come with me, Hardy," he said promptly.

"Where, Mr. Dunn?"

"To the Saxton works."

"I had rather not go there," demurred Ben, holding back a trifle.

"Got to," declared Dunn definitely, "if I have to lug you there bodily. You ain't the one who will get hurt. It's Saxton."

The foreman pranced down the street at a furious rate. Ben kept up with him. Dunn acted like a smouldering volcano. He gritted his teeth, he clenched his fists ever and anon, he emitted growls and little roars.

"The escape valve will burst if I don't get action," he advised Ben. "Hurry up."

When they reached the plant, Dunn proceeded straight towards the private office of its proprietor.

"Mr. Saxton is very busy over some accounts," advised the bookkeeper.

"He'll see me, or I'll burst in the door," declared the forcible Dunn, thrusting aside the office underling, and opening the door before him. "You keep with me, Hardy," he advised.

Jasper Saxton looked up from his desk in an irritated way at the bold intrusion. Then, observing Ben, he scowled darkly.

"What's that boy doing here?" he demanded.

"I brought him," retorted Dunn.

"Take him away again. He has no business around here."

"Yes, he has, and he'll stay," observed Dunn sharply. "I need him."

"What for?"

"As a witness."

"Witness to what?" demanded Saxton, with a blank stare.

"To what I'm going to tell you. Saxton, you are an unmitigated scoundrel!"

"W—what?"

With a bound the manufacturer came to his feet. He seemed about to spring upon his audacious foreman. He doubled up his fists and tried to awe the venturesome Dunn, who cooly looked him in the eye.

"Oh, yes," derided the foreman. "Try it. Just once! I think I'd be willing to pay a big fine just for the excuse to give you the beating of your life."

"What's that? what's this?" gasped the astonished Saxton.

"Say," continued his foreman in sharp, cutting tones. "I've worked my last stroke for the meanest man I ever knew. You've lost a better man in Martin Hardy, but you'll miss me just the same. Saxton, you are a thief. You stole poor Hardy's automobile patents. You are now trying to rob him of his airship patents. You've sold your soul outright, and I predict that you'll go down in failure and disgrace. I'm through with you, and in time every decent man in your employ will leave you in the lurch. You sent me out to-day to use my influence to get that big motor-cycle order from the Evans people. Well, I've got it, and I'm going to turn it over to the Diebold works. You unmitigated scoundrel! Come, Hardy."

Ben saw Jasper Saxton, white and trembling, sink back into his chair in a heap, collapsed. As they got outside, his impetuous but determined companion left him summarily, with the words:

"Tell your father I shall be up to see him this evening."

"Whew!" commented Ben, in one long marveling breath.

His step was brisk and his face beaming as he went homewards. Things had taken a turn. If he and his father had met with some misfortunes,

the same had brought to their rescue staunch, loyal friends.

Ben told his father about Mr. Dunn. and Mr. Hardy brightened up somewhat. After supper Ben went down town to the village telegraph office. He knew the night despatcher, who welcomed him with a friendly smile.

"Nothing for my father, is there, Mr. Noyes?" asked Ben.

"Nothing so far. Expecting something?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it may come in the half rate grist. That begins soon. Won't you wait?"

Ben sat down. The dispatcher attended to his wires. Then, as a new clicking succeeded to a brief lapse in business, he smiled and nodded at Ben, while writing out the message.

"I'll deliver it to my father," said our hero. "Don't mind an envelope."

"Just receipt for him, then," advised the operator, handing Ben the yellow sheet. "Charges prepaid."

"Hurrah!" shouted Ben irrepressibly, as he glanced at the sheet and summarily bolted from the place, a keen delight overcoming his embarrassment.

His eyes sparkled and he ran like the wind all the way home. He was the messenger of good news, indeed. As he came to the house he found the sitting room illuminated brightly. It cheered his heart to observe his father laughing cheerily, while there

was a growing happy expression on the face of his mother.

They had company. Two men were in the same room. They were Caleb Dunn, and Mr. Earle from the Diebold machine shops at Martinville.

Ben paused unobserved at the open window of the sitting room to learn that Earle had made a splendid offer to his father to start in at work at Martinville.

Then our hero entered the house through the kitchen. On the table he noticed the airship parts that had been returned.

"Father," he said, bursting rather unceremoniously upon the group in the sitting room, the open telegram in his hand, "here is some good news for you."

Mr. Hardy took the paper. He was trembling all over as he perused it. A look of intense joy illumined his usually serious face.

The telegram read:

"Claim filed on two airship inventions of Martin Hardy. All rights protected."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FIVE HUNDRED DOLLAR PRIZE

"THE *Dart* is a beauty! I'd like to meet that ingenious father of yours, Ben!"

"He would feel honored to know you, I am sure, Mr. Davis."

"Just as soon as this meet is over, I am going to get him to build me a new airship modeled after the *Dart*. It's the best machine I have yet seen."

"You will have to deal with the Diebold people, then, Mr. Davis, " advised Ben. "They have gone into the airship business, and father is superintendent of that department of their plant."

"Well, I'll have to be contented with his supervision," observed the old aviator. "I would a good deal rather pay him for special individual service."

"That would be pretty difficult for the present. My father is putting in all his spare time at home on what he calls an Airatorium."

"And what is that, Ben?" inquired Mr. Davis with interest.

"A safe, substantial airship for sick people—a sort of an aerial hospital. His idea is to construct a machine that will take invalids up into perfect sunshine, pure air and exhilarating calmness."

"I see— a grand idea."

"Father says that light at high elevations is richer in ultra violet rays."

"Say, you're some scientist, aren't you?" put in Bob Dallow.

"I'll give you some more," laughed Ben: "You get out of the bacterial effect in the upper air currents."

"Well, I'll have a talk with Mr. Hardy after we've won the high flight and long distance prizes," observed Mr. Davis.

"Oh, you are going to win both of them, are you?" chuckled Bob.

"I said 'we,' " corrected Mr. Davis, with a quick glance at Ben. "I have made my record on the elevation feature. What do you say, Ben, to taking my place and seeing what the *Dart* can do?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Ben, "you don't mean it?"

"I do, and you shall," replied the old aviator promptly. "It's your heart's desire—eh? And you would like to get that five hundred dollar prize to help your father carry on his suit against Saxton."

"I say, Bob," cried Ben quickly, "you have been telling secrets out of school."

"I am glad he did, for I am interested in both you and your father," spoke up the aviator. "Your ambition is most laudable. I have entered the *Dart* for the race to-morrow, and I fully expect you will get ready for it."

Ben was once more at the aviation field at Blairville and the *Dart* was with him. That splendid little machine had arrived from Woodville the day previous.

Two weeks had been devoted to its completion, and a perfect monoplane was the result. It had many new features that evoked the interest and admiration of some of the leading aviators at the meet.

Mr. Hardy and Caleb Dunn had accepted excellent positions at Martinville. Tom Shallock had carried out his boasts. He was now head machinist at the Saxton Automobile Works. A week after he had taken charge three men left the Saxton employ, and Ben heard incidentally that Shallock had become generally disliked by his fellow employees and was under the influence of liquor most of the time.

It was said that Saxton nearly had a fit when he found out how his evil plots had been circumvented by the Hardys in securing the airship patents first. Saxton troubled them no further. The report that Mr. Hardy had been guilty of stealing found few believers. One day Ben met the big manufacturer

skulking down the street, as if he feared every minute being served with the papers by lawyer Pearsons.

When Ben made his second visit to the aviation field, he found Dick Farrell still in the employ of Rollins. Ben always spoke pleasantly to Dick, but the latter greeted this courtesy with a sullen nod only. There was a vindictive look in Farrell's eye that Ben distrusted fully.

Several times Ben went into Blairville and finally located the home of Knippel. This man lived in a retired cottage, had a small family who associated with no one in the village, and he was considered to follow some mysterious business that took him away from home most of the time.

Now Ben's thoughts were so completely on aviation and all of its alluring features, that he forgot all his past trouble and present complications.

That day he had made several trial flights. He had the advantage of the experience and direction of Mr. Davis and Bob. He understood the *Dart* perfectly. Ben could hardly sleep for excitement that night, and he and Bob were among the earliest arrivals on the aviation field next morning.

The day was warm and still, but there were lowering clouds. After a critical decision as to weather conditions, Mr. Davis told Ben that the same were not very favorable for either a high or a rapid flight.

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Eight biplanes and four monoplanes were to take part in the test. Ben chose his own course away from the others. Bob, after urging up the *Dart,* uttered an enthusiastic hurrah as he noted the splendid start his friend had made.

The *Dart* was soon out of sight, the heavy layer of surface clouds obscuring its progress. Ben started in on a spiral flight. As he struck a second strata of clouds, he encountered some strong cross currents of air.

"It's getting choppy," ruminated the young aviator, and he arranged so he could lower the front control of the machine readily in case of a sudden gust.

It began to get chilly and uncomfortable as he struck a higher altitude. His leather suit was none too warm for him and splatters of moisture clouded the goggles he wore.

Ben bent himself to his work like a trained pilot. There were places where great banks of cloud enveloped him. He drove the monoplane through these like a torpedo boat thrusting its way through an opposing wave.

"Brr-rr!" he shivered, as an icy gale made the planes bend and rattle, and he felt himself becoming benumbed by the cold.

The highly rarefied air began now to affect heart and brain. Only by conserving his breath could Ben refrain from gasping outright.

"What is that?" he exclaimed, as a grinding, wrenching motion shook the machine.

It was an accumulation of ice on the planes of the airship. Icicles fell into the machinery, threatening to stop the motor.

"I've reached the limit, I guess," decided Ben, dizzy-headed and half frozen.

A storm of hail cut against him as he made a full one mile glide. Then strata after strata of clouds were penetrated. A blurred landscape and dim outlines of houses and trees gradually came into view. When Ben alighted, both he and the aeroplane were coated with ice.

He had to be helped from the machine, but, benumbed as he was with the cold, he was conscious of ringing cheers all about the aviation field.

Mr. Davis carried the barograph from the machine to the judges' stand. Bob and some others led and carried Ben to the quarters of the *Flyer*.

Ben found it supreme luxury to repose on a couch. His lungs pained him, and he was so exhausted he dropped into profound sleep at once.

His next conscious moment was a recognition of the voice of Mr. Davis, saying:

"Let him sleep, he needs it."

"But—such glorious news!" cried the tones of Bob Dallow.

"I am awake," declared Ben, opening his eyes and sitting up. "What's the glorious news?"

"Why," said Mr. Davis with a beaming face, "the barograph says you have beaten the *Flyer* altitude record by three hundred feet. Hardy, you have won the five hundred dollar prize."

CHAPTER XIX

"GO!"

"BEN, Ben, wake up!"

"What is the matter—what has happened?"

"The very worst—the Davis quarters is on fire and the *Flyer* is burning up."

Ben bounded from the mattress on which he lay. He did not have to grope to find his clothes. A great glare shone into the little shed which he and Bob had occupied since the *Dart* had arrived on the field. It was some distance from the Davis place, and had a canvas extension which housed the Woodville machine.

Bob was getting into his clothes, uttering excited disjointed sentences, meanwhile keeping his eyes fixed on the center of the fiery glare.

"It is certainly in the direction of the Davis quarters," said Ben hurriedly, "but it may not be his place."

"But it is. Can't you see—the exact location, and two men rushing by shouted that it was."

Fleet-footed and breathless, the two youths

dashed across the patch of sward between their new quarters and the blazing pile. Half the distance accomplished, their worst fears were verified.

"It's the *Flyer,*" panted Bob.

The roaring flames and excited shouts kept up a wild uproar about a vivid midnight picture. There was no water supply on the field. Before the Blairville fire department could be summoned the aerodrome would be in ashes. The only thing that helpers could do was to get long poles and pull the blazing canvas off the shelter tent away from the frame extension of the Davis living quarters.

"It's all gone up, tent and machine," choked out Bob, as they came directly upon the scene.

"Yes, and—oh—Mr. Davis is hurt."

Ben rushed up to the old aviator as he spoke. Two men were leading Mr. Davis from the smouldering ruins. The way they helped him hold his hands showed that he had met with some accident.

"Oh, Mr. Davis," cried Ben, "what is it?"

The aviator turned a pale and troubled face on his young assistant.

"Yes, Ben!" he said, forcing a smile, "don't get scared. Just a singe or two on the hands."

Ben saw that the sleeves of the coat Mr. Davis wore hung in shriveled threads. His hands were seared and blistered.

"A little liniment will fix me up all right," said the aviator with affected cheerfulness, as he noticed

the deep concern on the face of Bob as well as that of Ben. "Keep your nerve, lads, you may need it to-morrow."

His helper, as the man was called who had oiled and taken care of the *Flyer,* came up at that moment.

"Here, Jones," called the aviator, halting. "Have you got a good revolver?"

"Two of them, Mr. Davis."

"Get them both, and start up to the *Dart* quarters wihout a minute's delay. Don't keep your eye off the machine a single minute until I relieve you at daylight. If any skulker comes within ten feet of the place, pepper him. You, Ben Hardy, come along with me."

The old aviator spoke like some commanding general. There was a sternness to his expression that was significant. As he entered the door of the quarters he cast a backward glance at the smouldering wreck of the *Flyer* and sighed. Then his face became set and grim.

"My lads here will attend to me, friends," he spoke to the two men who had helped him.

"Can't we be of some use to you, Mr. Davis?" inquired one of them.

"Why, yes, come to think of it. I wish one of you would tell Mr. Bridges I want to see him, the quicker the better."

"He may be in bed, if the fire hasn't routed him out."

"Then wake him up—it's very important."

The men departed. The aviator planted himself in an armchair and gave his orders to Ben and Bob. Very soon they had the sleeves of his coat cut off at the elbow. Without a wince or a groan Mr. Davis directed them like a skilled surgeon. Liniment was applied to his burns, cotton and bandages set in place, and finally the old aviator sank back in real or affected comfort, with the words:

"That's fine. It doesn't bring back the *Flyer*, poor old friend, but it mends me up for the tussle."

"You aren't thinking of trying for to-morrow, with your hands in that condition?" interrogated Bob.

Before the aviator could reply, Mr. Bridges had arrived. He was the director of the meet, its high executive official.

"Dear me, Davis," he exclaimed in genuine concern, "this is a serious affair. I needn't tell you I am dreadfully sorry. Have you sent for a doctor."

"Yes," nodded the aviator with a smile, "you."

"Eh?"

"That's it—I want you to doctor up to-morrow's programme."

"Yes, it will be a severe disappointment to the public—no *Flyer*, no Davis."

"But I wish to be represented, just the same."

"Oh."

"Now, see here, Bridges," proceeded the old aviator, "there is not the least occasion in the world for red tape. It's a plain, simple proposition of a plain, straightforward man. I have a place on the programme. I claim it."

"But you have no airship to enter."

"Yes, I have—the *Dart.*"

"Oh, I see," nodded the director, "Very good. Operator?"

"Operators—two: Dallow and Hardy. Make a note of it officially, Bridges, and see that we have a fair show."

"It's a little irregular, isn't it?"

"So was the burning of the *Flyer,*" remarked Mr. Davis dryly.

"Any suspicions?

"If I have any, they will keep until this meet is over. Then I may have something to say. Can I depend on the substitute entry as I make it, with no quibbling?"

"You can depend on any service I can give an old friend and a square man," assured the director heartily.

"Thank you. You give that fair show, and I'll try and keep up the Davis reputation."

The aviation director retired with a courteous bow. As the door closed on him, Mr. Davis turned his glance upon his two young assistants.

"Well?" he demanded with a quissical smile.

"You have dazed me," spoke Ben, with a wondering break in his voice. "Do you really mean it?"

"Same here," piped in Bob. "It's like getting a fortune all at once."

"Oho! so you are counting on the prize already, are you?" chuckled Mr. Davis.

"Isn't that what you expect us to do?" challenged Bob.

"I reckon it is," assented the aviator.

"Then we will try, Mr. Davis," said Ben, a tremor of excitement in his voice, but rare determination in his eye, "we will try hard."

"That's the talk," said the aviator encouragingly. "Now then, bring that little stand close to my side."

Ben obeyed the order.

"Open that yellow paper. Spread it out. Both of you sit down close up to me. This is a special weather report that arrived five hours ago. The red lines and notations are mine. Listen carefully, and try and catch my idea of the surest and easiest course for to-morrow's run."

Both boys were impressed with the intensest interest and admiration, as the old aviator explained his ideas. Mr. Davis had marked out a zig-zag course to the northwest. At a glance, Ben could discern how carefully he had calculated and planned with expert skill.

Taking wind velocity, temperature readings, bar-

ometric depressions and storm centres for a basis, the wise old aviator had blocked out a course like a pilot at sea directing his ship through sandbars, reefs and counter winds. Where there was a cross air current, a mark designated it. He even indicated the altitude average.

"Why," cried the exuberant Bob, "you make it a mere playing, Mr. Davis!"

"Do I?" retorted the old aviator grimly. "You may change your mind after a four hour's spin. It's no fun, lads."

"I do not see how we can fail to do something quite fair, under all these conditions," said Ben.

"It will be simply a question of the gasolene supply," explained Mr. Davis. "There, however, is where that auxiliary pipe feature your father has invented comes in good. Now then, I want you to go to bed and shut your eyes and minds to the world till I wake you up. Remember, you have the biggest day of your lives before you, and you will need your best nerve and strength to meet it."

"Hurrah!" crowed the irrepressible Bob.

"We'll say that when we win," added Ben.

They were not awakened until eight o'clock the next morning. Bob began to worry, and Ben himself was flustered at the lateness of the hour.

"Easy, now," ordered Mr. Davis, "you two fellows are simply dummies in the hands of trainers till we land you in the *Dart*."

Mr. Davis had sent for two new aviation suits for the boys, the latest and best that could be procured. They fitted comfortably, and the boys made a fine professional appearance in them.

Mr. Davis had left them to chat together over their meal. When they rejoined him in his sitting room, they found him with two telegrams lying open on the stand before him.

"Change the course as I direct, Ben," he said. "The weather conditions are practically the same as last night's report showed, except at two points. I'll name them to you. Make a westerly deviation at the first, and take a high level at the second."

Ben did as he was directed. Bob, leaning over his shoulder, made a wry face.

"What's the matter with you?" inquired Mr. Davis quickly.

"Huh!" complained Bob, "you've marked out only a thousand-mile run."

"Hear him! A thousand miles? Why, if you have enough backbone to beat six hundred and fifty miles, you win the prize," declared the old aviator.

It was a grandly inspiriting scene, that upon which Ben Hardy and Bob Dallow entered an hour later. The sun was bright, the sky was clear and speckless of a single cloud, the air brisk and invigorating. It was a typical day for air sailing, and the young sky pilots felt hopefully at their best.

The aviation field was a gay and entrancing spec-

tacle. At its edge were gathered several thousand spectators, automobiles, motor-cycles and other vehicles, some trimmed in gala array. Pennants were strung here and there about the field, and the nine aeroplanes entered for the contest were as pretty as dainty birds, straining to try their wings in the empyrean.

Hails and cheers rang out in every direction. There was hearty applause as Ben and Bob, the youngest aviators in the contest, took their places in the *Dart*. Ben tried the levers and the other various parts of the machine.

"She works like a watch," he declared to his companion.

"Ready," was Bob's reply, his eye on the judge's stand.

Boom!—flared forth the signal gun, followed by a general chorus, uttered in the word so thrilling to the heart of the enthusiastic aviator:

"Go!"

Lifted from earth on a superb sweep, true to its name, the *Dart* arose on a splendid arrow course. There was a fascinating spiral whirl as the graceful aeroplane struck an upper air current. Then, fondly, longingly viewed by the old aviator and his friends, the *Dart* diminished, became a mere speck, and faded away in the far distance.

CHAPTER XX

CRUSOES OF THE AIR

"I'ts business now," said Bob Dallow, between his teeth.

"And guesswork," added Ben. "Hit or miss, though, we've got to make land. The tank register is at the exhaust line. Where do you suppose we are, Bob?"

"Brr-rr! Judging from the weather, Medicine Hat. The way we've spun along, I should think we were just about over Alaska."

"That's nonsense, of course," responded Ben, "but we have done some travelling. Keep watch on the forward planes, now."

The young aviators were veritable Crusoes of the air, marooned in cloudland, lost in a void of ether. As Bob aptly expressed the situation, it was business now, sharp and serious.

The *Dart* had made a splendid run. At first it had been an experience of fun, novelty and interest for its light-hearted crew. The vast panorama spread out under them had been entrancing. Up to

mid afternoon they knew pretty well where they were. Bob kept close track of the chart markings, and when they descended on top of a high hill near a little town, they were soon visited by curious throngs from the village near by, and knew that they were over two hundred and fifty miles from the starting point.

"That's not so bad," observed Bob, "over sixty miles an hour."

"Not if we can keep up a long flight," said Ben.

This had been their only stopping place. It cost them over two hours' time. They had some difficulty in securing a new gasolene supply and other things they needed. The machine was carefully oiled and the flight resumed, the bold aviators feeling encouraged by the tremendous cheering of a throng viewing a real monoplane for the first time.

Two hours later real work began. They had something of a tussle fighting an ugly cross current of air. Next a storm cloud interfered. They lost their bearings somewhat, and as dusk came on they were entirely at sea as to location.

About ten o'clock in the evening, after a visit to the lower atmosphere, the air voyagers became assured of one fact: They were no longer traversing a settled range of territory. The night was black, and had become foggy. It had grown chill and uncomfortable as well.

There was not a speck of light visible earthwards

anywhere. One long sweep took them over a vast body of water. Then came an interminable stretch of vast forests.

"We seem to have passed civilization," remarked Ben.

"We are clear out of the United States, anyway," declared Bob.

"My plan is to get to a good altitude and put the motors to the limit," was Ben's suggestion.

"All right, if we can stand the cold."

The experiments of the half dozen ensuing hours neither of the young aviators ever forgot. It was a real endurance test. There was cold, darkness, uncertainty, discomfort and peril to combat. Only that the splendid little *Dart* behaved grandly, were they able to keep up an uninterrupted forward progress. Then there were many bad tips and tilts, but skill and attention evaded any real mishap.

"We have driven our craft to the last limit of speed," announced Ben at last. "The fuel gauge is at danger line."

"That settles it, then," said Bob. "It's all over but the barograph readings, now."

Ben set the *Dart* on a downward slant. It was high time to descend. As they pierced a broad ribbon of dense cloud and made out outlines of hills and trees below, the chug—chug of the motor grew fainter and less distinct. The sound diminished finally to a choking gasp, and the *Dart* rested on a

broad even surface in the midst of great trees, almost of its own volition.

"We made it just in time," said Bob, climbing from the machine with an immense sigh of relief. "What time is it, Ben?"

Ben lighted a match and consulted the dial of the treasured timepiece presented to him by the employees of the Saxton Automobile Works.

"Just fifteen minutes after one," he announced.

"Then we have been fourteen hours on the spin," calculated Bob. "I don't believe any of the others have beat that."

"We don't know that, of course."

"It's surely nine hundred miles," continued Bob, "maybe twelve hundred. It seemed to me we just spun along these last four hours."

"We have done finely," declared Ben, "and we should feel pretty glad to land with no mishaps."

While his companion was seeking for the food sack in the body of the machine, Ben was unshipping some of the planes and wiring the wheels to near tree stumps, so the flying machine could not be budged if a sudden wind came up.

"I wonder where we are, Ben?" inquired Bob, appearing with the canvas bag that held some tools and a bulky package of food.

"No telling. I couldn't keep track of direction after it got dark."

"We're probably out of the range of running fuel, anyway," surmised Bob.

"Yes, I think that is right."

"What's the programme, then?"

"Why, we can only wait till morning, get our bearings, locate some village and tell our story. Some reputable people must come to the monoplane with us, seal up the speedometer, make affidavits as to our arrival, and we get back to Mr. Davis to report."

"And leave the *Dart* here?" questioned Bob, in alarm.

"Certainly not. We must arrange to have it packed and shipped on after us, no matter what it may cost."

"If we have only won the prize—oh, if we only have!" began Bob ardently, and then: "Hello!"

The speaker dropped the hunk of bread and cheese he was eating with a vivid exclamation, and stood poised in a staring attitude, glancing through the surrounding trees.

"What now, Bob?" questioned Ben.

"A light."

"I see it!"

"Maybe it's a village—a house, anyhow. The sooner we prove our arrival, the better for our claims, eh, Ben?"

"Perhaps."

"Come on—this is luck."

Ben hesitated for a moment. He did not like to leave the *Dart*. Still, it was safely secured, and scarcely liable to discovery in that remote and solitary place. He joined his companion, and they started in the direction of the light.

Bob was so eager and excited that he did not leave the bag behind, but kept possession of it, slinging it over one shoulder by the piece of flexible wire running through the handles.

The two journeyers did not note their environment particularly. They had several tumbles going down a sheer hilly descent. They encountered fallen trees and brambles threading a jungle-like maze. All the time, however, they kept the distant light in view as a beacon. This led to many turns and windings to evade obstructing objects.

"Whew!" ejeculated Bob at last, as they came to some kind of a stream. "We must have gone miles. I'm footsore and wringing wet with perspiration."

"That light is across the river, and miles away yet," said Ben.

"Well, we'll line the stream and cross when we get nearer. We can't miss reaching it now."

They proceeded on this basis. Less than half a mile accomplished, however, both halted simultaneously with a shock.

"Gone!" cried Ben in consternation.

"Yes,"groaned his disappointed comrade.

The point of light seemed suddenly to lift in the

air. It divided into whirling darts of flame, and then into a cascade of sparks. Then there was a black blank where the radiance had shown.

"Don't you see?" cried Bob, in a dismayed tone.

"See what?"

"It wasn't a lamp. It was a campfire. Some one probably stopping to cook a bite. He kicked out the fire and went on."

"It looks that way," assented Ben slowly.

"Yell at the top of your voice," directed Bob, seizing Ben's arm to enforce his suggestion.

They united their voices in a series of ringing shouts and yells. The silent wilderness about them rang with the vivid echoes. For the space of two minutes they bent their ears in anxious, eager suspense.

"You see, we are too far away to be heard," said Ben.

"I'm afraid so," replied Bob, in deep disappointment.

"Hark! I heard something," interrupted Ben sharply.

"Yes, a sound—a sort of roar. Behind us, though. Oh, my!"

Bob grasped his companion's arm and dragged him forward.

"Run! run!" he shouted. "It's a bear."

CHAPTER XXI

A FIGHT WITH A BEAR

THE night was dark and cloudy and there was not a star in sight. However, it was possible to discover outlines at a near distance. As Ben cast a startled glance at a great bushy object not twenty feet away, growling savagely and moving directly towards them, he realized that there was some foundation to his companion's startling statement.

"Quick, this way. Climb up, I say," shouted Bob, his rapid run landing them directly up against a large tree.

"You first, Bob."

"Me last. Climb, I tell you!" screamed Bob. "Whew! that was close."

Ben had grasped at a low limb of the tree. He was conscious that Bob clambered up directly after him, but not so readily.

"That was just in time," panted Bob, as both got to a higher limb of the tree. "Got the heel of my shoe, that's all."

Below, two baneful orbs of flickering radiance

glowered up at them. The bear growled fiercely and began scratching at the hard bark of the tree.

It was a benumbing realization to the two boys to come direct from a safe civilization within less than twenty-four hours into a district infested with savage wild beasts.

"He's climbing!" cried Bob.

"We must go higher."

"Then so will he."

"We have no firearms."

"No," replied the doughty Bob, "but there's a good stout hammer in the bag, and I'm going to see what I can do with it. Here's a candle, light it. They say a light keeps bears at bay."

"It doesn't this one," reported Ben a minute later.

"That's so. Keep it going so I can see, though, but be ready to climb if I don't make it."

The head of the hammer Bob was wielding was flat and heavy. Its reverse end ran to quite a point. He swung slightly down from the limb they occupied. As the bear got four feet up the tree, the dauntless Bob reached out.

The hammer landed on one forepaw of the bear. The animal growled and drew the paw away as if easing it from the pain. Bob swung lower. He made a terrific swoop with his only weapon.

"Something cracked!" he shouted in encouraging tones. "It told, Ben. Down he goes."

The head of the hammer had landed against the snarling mouth of the bear. Judging from the sound, the blow had smashed one or two of his molars. Dropped to the trunk of the tree, bruin now rubbed his face with his paws in an angry growling way, and the light of the candle showed blood dripping from the ponderous jaws of the animal.

"He won't venture up again, I reckon," remarked Bob.

"No, but he seems settled down there for the night."

"Well, we'll have to stay up here all night," responded Bob.

The bear now lay flat on the ground at the base of the tree, his eyes fixed obliquely towards his treed enemies. There was no doubt that the angry animal had taken up the patient position of a watcher and waiter.

"I say," observed Ben, after a moment's cogitation, "I have an idea, if we want to drive the bear away."

"Well, he isn't very pleasant company to have around."

"Have you any of ignition oil in the bag?"

"Yes, two cans of it," reported Bob, inspecting the contents of the bag.

"Give me one. That's it. Now, you hold the candle and get out a coil of wire."

"What's the stunt."

"You will see. It may not work."

Ben unscrewed the top of the can of highly inflammable oil. Then, poising just right, he leaned over and let its contents drop upon the broad extended body of the bear.

The animal sniffed and turned its head to one side as the pungent odor of the oil assailed its nostrils. It did not budge, however, while its eyes glowered up into the tree more dangerously than ever.

"Its hide is pretty well soaked," reported Ben, as the contents of the can became exhausted. "Now then, attach the candle to the wire, lower it, and——"

"Fire up. Ha! ha! Ben, quite an idea."

The bear uttered a ferocious growl and swept the air with one paw furiously as the candle approached. Its aim was futile, however. The candle reached the oil-soaked hide. There was a blinding sweep of flame.

In one second the great animal was swept by a brilliant wave of fire. It was only a surface skim, but, scared to death, the bear arose with magical swiftness, uttered a piercing roar, made for the river bank, took a header, and the boys heard a tremendous splash in the water twenty feet below.

"I don't think his bearship will trouble us any

further," remarked Bob, preparing to descend from the tree.

"No," replied Ben, "but some other bear or animal may. I suggest that we climb to that big crotch up yonder. It looks roomy and comfortable. We can only wander around aimlessly in the darkness. We'll take a good rest, and start out in earnest to find out where we are as soon as daylight comes."

They found the upper tree crotch roomy enough to lie in on a slant. They decided on alternate hour watches, and had a good lunch before they began the arrangement for passing the night.

"How is the commissary department, Bob?" inquired Ben, as they descended to the ground after daylight.

"Enough to last a whole day, I should think," replied Bob.

They had an ample breakfast. Then there was some indecision as to their immediate progress.

"We know about where the *Dart* is," said Bob. "The river is a kind of a landmark. I suggest that we try to find some houses or settlement."

"That's south," said Ben, pointing, after consulting a small compass he carried with him. "Suppose we start in that direction."

"I'm agreeable," assented his lively comrade. "We're bound to land somewhere."

The two youths were in fine spirit, and chatted animatedly until noon. There was so much to think

of—the successful trip, the return home, the possible prize. A shower came up, and in seeking shelter they wandered away from the river. They could not locate it again after a two hours' search, and night came on, finding them in a deep gully shut in by high frowning walls of rock.

Ben, somewhat subdued, set about arranging some boulders to protect the opening of a cave-like depression where they had decided to spend the night.

"I say, Ben," observed Bob, "there's just about two more meals left in the bag—light ones, too."

"Oh, well, this won't last," declared Ben hopefully. "We found some berries and nuts to-day, and maybe with grubbing we might discover something else that would tide us over."

"Yes, that's so," assented Bob, but not at all enthusiastically. "It don't change a pretty serious situation, though."

"How it that?"

"Well, we're in a howling wilderness, aren't we?"

"It's the wilderness all right," assented Ben.

"And we face two sure conclusions," went on Bob Dallow, "we've lost the *Dart* and can't find it, and we're lost ourselves."

CHAPTER XXII

A FRIEND IN NEED

"We will have to get some more wood."

"Yes, Ben. It won't do to let the fire go down, with a lot of all kinds of wild and bloodthirsty animals hanging around."

"Provided any disturb us."

"There's the risk, isn't there?" demanded Bob. "I saw sure signs of a bear, and a den that looked like a panther's home. Come on. Two more big armfuls will pull us through."

After a second day of weary aimless wanderings, the aviator refugees had made a camp under a tree near a little thicket. They had built a fire as night came on, had divided the last bread and meat in the bag, and were trying to forget the disappointments of the day and the discouraging outlook of the morrow.

They were soon busily engaged in gathering up dead pieces of wood at the edge of the thicket. The reflection from the campfire aided them in their work. Ben had a heavy branch with which he

poked up pieces of dead wood covered by leaves. These he would throw into a heap at one side, to which his comrade was also adding by his efforts.

Ben was thinking of home and the anxiety of his parents. He tried to banish the blues by whistling a jolly tune. As he started to probe with a stick in a mass of matted leaves, the music halted on his lips, and his eyes became fixed in a terrified stare upon a tree ten feet away.

Poised upon one of its branches, its eyes gleaming with ferocious fire, just ready to spring upon Bob, who, unconscious of his peril was gathering an armful of fuel, was a panther.

For only an instant Ben was held breathless and spell-bound by the curdling spectacle. Then with a great shout and brandishing his stick wildly, he ran forward to obstruct the spring of the fierce animal and save his friend.

Too late! As the lithe creature darted through the air, Ben reeled with horror, his eyes closed to shut out the hideous sight and weakness and despair overcame him.

Bang! What was that? A sharp report rang out. Ben made out a strange form near the campfire with a smoking rifle in hand. He saw the panther diverge in its leap, turn completely over, and with a furious snarl drop to the ground, while Bob, lifting his head, demanded coolly:

"I say, what's happening?"

Ben ran to his side, clinging to his arm, faltering out an incoherent explanation. Then in amazement both advanced to the silent erect figure outlined like some statue in the red glow of the campfire.

"Why, it's an Indian," broke out the wondering Bob. "Say, hello!"

"How," responded the stranger, with something of subserviency in his manner. He was a mild-faced, gentle-mannered half breed.

Ben grasped his hands and swung it up and down fervently, pointing to the gun and then to the dead panther.

"You have saved my friend!" he cried, touching Bob's shoulder lovingly with his free hand.

"Me friend," pronounced the Indian awkwardly.

"Yes, you are my friend, too—my good friend. What can we do for you?"

"Salt."

"What is that?" inquired Bob strangely.

The Indian had a bag strung across his back. He drew out of it a fat pheasant, evidently recently killed, and just dressed and washed at some near stream, for it was dripping with fresh water.

"No fire—no salt," he said. "You salt?"

"Salt?" repeated Bob buoyantly. "Loads of it. Why, about all we have got is salt—and pepper. Look here."

The lunch put up at the aero meet had included a dozen hard boiled eggs. A salt and a pepper

bottle had accompanied them. Very little of the condiment had been used.

The Indian's eyes sparkled, as he at the discovery of a treasure, as he viewed the salt longingly. Then he passed the pheasant over to Ben with an unctious snack of the lips and the words: :

"You cook—plenty salt."

"Yes, and give you the bottle for yourself," cried the exuberant Bob, slapping the Indian on the shoulder in a friendly familiar way. "I say, old chief, where are we? Can you direct us to any town? People, houses, white man's wigwam, understand?"

"Wigwam," grinned the half breed. "Oh, yes—yes, so," and he pointed south.

"You take us there?" inquired Ben eagerly.

"Morning. Me guide. See? Charge one dollar."

"You shall have ten," cried the delighted Bob, "and a whole barrel of salt thrown in."

The Indian could speak only a few words of English and could not sustain any conversation with them. When the pheasant was broiled they gave him half of it. They passed him the salt bottle and he was supremely happy. He made his share of the fowl look as if it was coated over with frosting, ate it clear to the bones, selected a place near the fire, used his bag for a pillow, and was placidly snoring inside of two minutes.

"Well, Ben, I guess we're headed for home at last," observed Bob.

"It looks so. I can hardly wait till morning to start."

"You won't wake Powhattan until he's all ready," declared Bob, as they turned in.

When Ben woke up in the morning, two large fish, scaled and cleaned, lay on pieces of bark before the smouldering fire. The Indian was missing, but his rifle lay beside the bag that had served as his pillow for the night.

"Where's Powhattan?" inquired Bob, rousing up. "Oh, there he is, taking a morning swim," added Ben, glancing past the thicket to where a little stream flowed. "Breakfast provided, eh? Where did the fish come from?"

"Our visitor must have got up early and gone fishing," explained Ben.

The fish were soon sizzling over the fire. Ben, waiting to have them browned to a turn, happened to glance at the rifle of the Indian and his game bag.

Something about the latter suddenly enchained his attention. He advanced towards it, picked it up, and uttered so vivid an exclamation of surprise that Bob ran quickly to his side with the inquiring words:

"What now, Ben?"

"This bag."

"I see it," nodded Bob.

"Do you notice anything familiar about it?" asked Ben, some latent excitement in his tones.

"Why—no."

BRAR

"Look closer," directed Ben. "See, it is made of a strip of something caught into bag shape and fastened with thorns. Do you notice the material? A strip of canvas."

"What of it?"

"Parafined canvas, too. See the wooden braces at each end? Why, Bob, this is a piece of an airship!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LOST AVIATOR

"A PIECE of an airship!" repeated Bob excitedly. "Ours?"

"The *Dart,* yes. The piece here is discolored and looks old, but a day's knocking around with this Indian here would do that."

"Then you figure out that he has discovered the *Dart* and utilized what he fancied about it to make a game bag, and this is it?"

"That is my guess."

"Mine, too," declared Bob. "If that is true, Ben, then the Indian must know the spot where the *Dart* is."

"Undoubtedly."

"Let's find out. Hey, hi, hello, guide, my friend Powhattan! This way, old fellow!"

The Indian, just through with his morning swim, arrived speedily, smiling and as placid as ever.

"I say, look here," said Bob, picking up the impromptu game bag, "yours?"

"Me, yes—yes," replied the Indian promptly.

"Did you make it?"

The Indian bowed assent.

"Where did you get this?" asked Bob, patting the canvas.

The Indian spoke a string of mingled words accompanied by vivid pantomine. He imitated the movement of wings and practically described an airship.

"Can you take us to the place where you found this?" asked Ben.

The Indian pointed southwest. He held up six fingers.

"He means about six miles from here," translated Bob.

"I guess he does. You take us. Understand? Then to the town, will you?"

The Indian held up two fingers now.

"He means two dollars," declared Bob. "All right my friend, twenty dollars, if you say so. That's the ticket, Ben. We'll locate the *Dart* first, so as to be sure we can find it later, and then have our guide take us to the settlement. Zip! but we're getting action at last."

The Indian seemed to understand what they wished him to do. He ate his fish, using nearly all the salt left, acted unusually satisfied and brisk, and, breakfast despatched, the boys followed him single file as he led the way from the spot.

They had gone about four miles when their guide

struck a narrow trodden path near the river. Its banks were densely fringed with heavy underbrush for over a mile. Then there was a break, an open place of perhaps three hundred feet. Just before reaching it, the Indian paused. He looked deeply serious, almost alarmed, Ben fancied, as he placed his finger warningly to his lips with the ominous words:

"Follow—quick—run fast."

"What's the reason, Powhattan?" asked Bob.

"Shoot. Prisoner. Bad white men."

"Oh, an enemy around, you mean?"

"Yes—yes. Come."

The Indian shot past the break in the shore line like a flash. Ben and Bob followed his directions. As they did so, they noted an island in the river. In its center stood a large log-framed building.

"That's queer," remarked Ben.

"Yes," observed Bob, "it looks like some fort."

"I wonder what there is to fear about it!"

"Can't guess. I saw no one about, did you?"

"No," replied Ben, "it looked deserted to me."

"Well, our guide is going ahead. Let us follow him."

Half a mile further on, the Indian turned into a maze of high willow bushes. Abruptly these ended in a kind of a swale. It was dry now, and they crossed it without difficulty. Then, as Ben and

Bob came to the middle of it, they halted dead short.

"Hello!" projected Bob, "an airship."

"But not ours!" cried Ben, lost in wonderment, "not the *Dart*."

The two friends stood bewilderedly staring at the wreck of a monoplane lying flat upon the ground. It was all in pieces. Some of the planes had been cut into and trampled on. The wheels were missing, and it had been stripped of many of its mechanical parts.

"Ben, what does it mean?" inquired Bob blankly.

"You can see for yourself. It is simply another airship than our own. It landed here by chance, just as ours landed where it did. Some one has carried away part of it."

"Probably some one living in that queer place on the island in the river."

"Very likely."

Their first surprise over, the young aviators made a closer inspection.

"It is a Zenapin model, and was a good one," reported Ben. "I wish I knew where it started from."

"Here's something that may tell," said Bob, abruptly tugging at the front dip board. "It's smashed, but part of the name is left."

"What is it?" inquired Ben, coming quickly to the side of his companion.

"T—E—O—"

"Only part of a name. What can it stand for?"

"Teodor? Hardly. Matteo? No, I give it up."

"Hold on," cried Ben, fishing among the scattered debris. "Here's another letter, or rather a part of one."

"An E," said Bob excitedly. "Now, where does that belong—before or behind?"

"Before—I've got it, Bob."

"What—quick!"

"M-E-T-E-O-R."

"Whew!"

Bob uttered such a gasp that it staggered him. He repeated it, as he rapidly fumbled in his coat pocket with the words:

"The *Meteor*? Why didn't I think of it before."

"Then you know something about the *Meteor*."

"I guess I do."

"What?"

"I'll show you in a minute."

Bob drew out his memorandum book. He extracted several newspaper clippings from its inner pocket. He selected one of these and read its heading:

"The Lost Aviator."

"Who was it, Bob?"

"Count Eric Beausire, a French aviator. Made a flight from Minneapolis last month. The *Meteor* never heard from since. Supposed lost in the wilds of Canada. One thousand dollars reward for any

information concerning the whereabouts of Count Beausire or his airship."

"And this is the *Meteor,*" murmured Ben, immersed and spellbound in a maze of speculation.

"And where is the lost aviator? Where is the missing Count Beausire?"

It was decidely gruesome to think of that. Involuntarily, both boys looked all about them.

"He must have left the airship at some other place," said Ben. "There is no trace of him here. It looks as if a good many people had visited this place. If he fell with the *Meteor* he has been discovered."

"What shall we do?" asked Bob.

"What can we do except to get to some settlement and report what we know, and have a search made for both the missing aviator and the *Dart.*"

"It's a thousand dollars for us, what we have already discovered," remarked Bob. "I'd give it to find the count. He must have been a fine man, for this newspaper clipping says that the reward is offered by the big International Aviation Club of New York."

The Indian had been pacing about and looking around him in a restless uneasy way ever since they had arrived at the uncanny spot. He seemed greatly relieved to start again on the course for the settlement.

When they reached the break in the river hedge, he again displayed anxiety and seriousness.

"Run fast," he directed.

The boys started to follow his suggestions to humor him. Half the open distance accomplished, however, Ben came to a standstill. He looked over towards the fort, like a structure on the island.

"What is it, Ben?" inquired Bob, coming back to where he stood, while with every indication of terror their guide scurried to cover.

"Did you hear a shout?"

"No, Ben."

"Well, I did. It sounded like a cry of distress. And see," added Ben excitedly, "from that cellar window. Some one is waving a handkerchief."

"I see it—I see it," said Bob.

"A shout for help and a signal of distress," said Ben thoughtfully, "Bob, I'm going to investigate this mystery."

CHAPTER XXIV

HOMEWARD BOUND

Ben beckoned to the Indian, but the latter refused to come beyond the protecting fringe of bushes. Ben approached him and pointed to the island.

"I want to go there," he said.

The guide professed great concern and terror. He was genuinely frightened. Nothing could prevail npon him to accompany the boys. In a disconnected way and with numerous gesticulations, he made it clear that bad white men were somewhere about the island waiting to annihilate all intruders.

"Why, the place is all shut up and looks practically deserted," said Bob.

"Except for the person waving at that window," added Ben. "Hark! he is shouting again. Let us descend to the river bank."

No demonstration of any kind greeted their exposing themselves to full view from the island. At first it looked as though they would have to swim over. Then Bob discovered a light canoe hidden

in among some high reeds. He and Ben got into the craft and paddled over to the island.

As they approached the log structure at its center, it suggested to them more of a fort than ever. It was built solidly, had port holes here and there in its sides, and marks in the logs showed where at some time or other musket balls and even larger projectiles had evidently assailed its staunch timbers from the mainland.

"No one seems to be moving about," said Bob. "Even that man in the cellar has got out of sight."

"They walked about the building until they came to a door letting into the cellar. This was protected with a simple hasp and bolt. Ben opened the door, Bob followed him into the cellar.

A somewhat remarkable sight greeted them. Seated on a sawbench with an upturned barrel before him was a man dressed in aviator costume. He had a comb and some other toilet articles on the barrel. With these he was arranging tangled disordered beard and hair. He tidied up a very much neglected collar and tie. He waxed his long mustachios with a stick of cosmetic.

"Gentlemen, I welcome!" he cried, and with graceful agility he sprang to his feet and made a bow like that of some courtier. Something jangled as he did this, and quick sighted Bob exclaimed in dismay:

"Ben, one foot is secured to a log chain running to that center post."

"Who are you?" began Ben, but guessing.

"I am the Count Eric Beausire," came the pleasant-toned response, "but, greater than so, an aviator, as you are, gentlemen," and he looked up and down the garb of the visitors.

"Yes," responded Ben, "we have just made a long distance flight on our monoplane, the *Dart*."

"I greet you as brothers," cried the count with a glad gracious wave of his hand. "Ah, it is a pleasure profound after weeks of confinement. Can I be released?"

"We shall see to that at once," declared Ben, and he and Bob made immediate inspection of the chain that held the count a captive. It was fortunate that they had some of the tools used in the monoplane in the bag which Bob still carried. With even this help and all Ben's mechanical skill it took them nearly two hours to get the count free.

The rescued man urged haste as they paddled over to the mainland. They found the Indian cowering and uneasy, and immensely relieved at their safe return. Several allusions had been made to the wrecked *Meteor*.

"I must see my beloved child of the air once more —a sad farewell," declared the count.

The boys led him to the swale brake. The nobleman looked over the scattered ruins of the monoplane. He selected a small piece of one of the planes, lifted his cap reverently, pressed his lips to

the little piece of wood, and placed it inside his breast as a cherished memento.

"Vandals!" he exclaimed, taking a last look at the wrecked airship and then shaking a clenched fist towards the island.

The party now took up the march for the settlement, much to the satisfaction of their Indian guide.

"I assume that the *Meteor* arrived in good condition here originally," began Ben, interested in learning the story of the refugee who was now their companion.

"Except for a dead motor, yes," responded the count. "I sought help. Misfortune led me to the house on that island. Ah, the banditti!"

"Who are they?" asked Ben.

"As I learned later, merciless outlaws, the proscribed of the commonwealth. There are ten of them. Immediately I was viewed with suspicion. Unfortunately I wore a star bearing secret symbols upon it—a testimonial from a foreign court where I had made an aero exhibition. These rabble took it for a badge of a detective. They refused to listen to explanations. I was chained up as a spy, the *Meteor* ruthlessly destroyed. Ah, the vampires!"

"They were outlaws, you say."

"I learned from what I heard and observed that they were proscribed men with a price on their head, the terror of the district. They have defied and even held at bay the government for years. They have

resisted a bombardment in their numerous fastnesses, of which the island fort is one."

"But we found you alone."

"Yes. It seems they anticipated a visit from the mounted police, and abandoned the island two days ago. They promised to send a person to release me after they had gotten over the border line."

By this time the boys knew that they were over two hundred miles over the American line in a wild part of Canada. Their spirits rose as with their new comrade they talked over all kinds of aviation events, told their own experiences, and listened to some thrilling stories of the count.

At last their Indian guide led them into a regularly traversed trail. They had not followed this any great distance when a trampling sound caused them to draw aside. In a few minutes a cavalcade dashed into view—the mounted police.

There were speedy explanations. The captain of the party became immensely interested in the strange stories of the refugees. He eagerly questioned the count as to details concerning the outlaws. Then he paid full attention to the story of the *Dart* from Ben's lips.

The latter explained to the official that he had plenty of ready money provided by John Davis to pay rewards and expenses. The result was that the police were divided into two parties.

"If the outlaws have really gone, good riddance,

and we won't follow them," said the officer. "Let one party visit the island and burn the old shack to the ground. The rest of us will look for your lost airship, Mr. Hardy, and report to you at the settlement. We'll be glad to have a hand in helping out you aviators. There is a big interest in airships everywhere, and we may get some helpful notice in the newspapers."

It was a decided satisfaction to Ben, Bob and the count to sit down to a good meal in a comfortable little hotel at the settlement two hours later. The Indian guide was handsomely rewarded. A courier had been hired to ride on horseback across country to the nearest telegraph station with messages for New York, Blairville and Woodville.

Before nightfall the captain of police came in with a report of the findings of the *Dart*. Ben immediately secured the services of a man owning a large broad wagon, and the next morning the monoplane was taken apart and packed on the vehicle.

Count Beausire took charge of the barograph and distance register, sealed both, and announced that he would accompany the boys to Blairville.

"My declaration as a representative of the international aero clubs, will be accepted as to the veracity of your exploit," he observed, somewhat grandly.

Ben paid liberally all those working in his behalf. Arrangements were made to ship the *Dart* to Blairville. The motor and some other parts of the

wrecked *Meteor* were also to be sent forward, at the request of Count Beausire.

The news quickly spread that the young aviators had made a truly wonderful flight, and many came to see Ben and Bob.

"I've got an extra telegram to send home," said Bob, and went off, leaving Ben alone at the hotel.

A little later our hero received a letter, asking him to call at a certain address in the town, to see a new invention of an airship. The letter added that Ben would regret it if he did not pay attention to the communication.

Curious to know what the invention might be, the young aviator started off alone. Quarter of an hour's walk brought him to the address given. It was a large, dilapidated house, and looked to be vacant.

"It doesn't look as if the inventor was very prosperous," commented Ben to himself. "But I guess none of them are when they're working on flying machines."

He rang the bell, but no one answered. He looked up at the front of the house. Many of the winodows were broken, and there was no sign of life.

"Guess I might as well walk right in," he said. "I'll probably find him in one of the back rooms puttering over some of his machinery."

He went into the hall, his footsteps echoing through the empty house. He made a tour of the first floor, and soon came to the conclusion that the

inventor must be in one of the upper stories. He got all the way to the top one before his search was successful. Then a voice hailed him from one of the rear rooms.

"Who is there?" a man called, speaking with a slight German accent.

"I'm Ben Hardy," called our hero, not observing his questioner. "I came to inquire about a flying machine. Are you the inventor?"

"I am, my young friend. I am glad you have called. I am just about to make a flight, and you shall see it."

A big man, in his shirt sleeves, and with a ragged pair of trousers on, stepped into view. He stood in the door of a room far down the topmost corridor. Ben advanced toward him, noting that the inventor was of great strength, as indicated by his powerful arms and shoulders.

"I shouldn't think you could go up very far in a place like this," said Ben pleasantly. "What sort of a flying machine is yours, an aeroplane or the gas-bag variety?"

"Neither," replied the inventor. "Mine is on an entirely new system. It is the screw principle, as old as the world, but applied in a new direction. I am the greatest inventor in the universe. My name is Hans Voller. Come in and see my machine. It is about to fly."

He held open the door of the room. Ben could

make out a mass of machinery, and a curious contrivance like a big auger.

"We are about to fly!" exclaimed Hans Voller, as he took our hero by the shoulder and shoved him into the dingy apartment, following himself and quickly locking the door. "We must have no spies, for there are many who would steal my ideas," the man added.

Ben sized him up for a harmless crank, though he did not like the locked door, nor the manner in which the eyes of the German glared at him. Still, the young aviator reflected, the man might be only out of his mind on this one subject of flying machines, and he had been in just as much danger, and more, dozens of times since becoming a "bird-man."

"Now attend!" exclaimed the inventor, as he put the key of the room in his pocket. "I will explain the principles on which this most wonderful machine works, and then I will demonstrate it to you. You will write it up for your aviation club, and I shall become famous. Do you see that screw?"

Ben nodded to show that he did. It was a curious contrivance of a double spiral, about seven feet high and half that in diameter at the top, tapering down to a point. It was made of woven basket work, covered with cloth, and painted white. Our hero compared it to two spiral stairways twined about a centre pole, similar to one he had seen in a circus once, and down which a man, shut up in a ball,

had rolled from the top of the tent to the ground.

"That screw solves the problem," the inventor went on. "I revolve that thousands of times a minute. It forces the air down, just as a screw of a steamer forces the boat ahead through the water. That lifts my machine up, and then I start my engine and we go ahead. I have not yet made a big machine, but I have tested this one by making it lift heavy weights. I want it to lift a person. I am too heavy for this little model, but you would be about right."

"I'm afraid I wouldn't care to try it," spoke Ben with a laugh.

"There is no danger! You must try it!" the German exclaimed. "See, I rotate the screw by this electric motor I have installed. Sometimes it gets going too fast and something breaks. Then I must look out. I hide behind this wooden screen," and he pointed to a strong one near the mass of machinery. "Now I have a chance to try my machine on a live person. I have long wanted to. I have made some improvements to-day, and you are just in time. You will fly!"

Before Ben knew what was happening the inventor had grabbed hold of him, pinning his arms to his side, and was advancing toward the big screw, which now began to revolve at a rapid rate.

Ben struggled to free himself, but the big German held him tightly. His face was close to that of the

young aviator, and the youth could see a strange gleam in the blue eyes. The hum of the motor as it increased in speed sounded loudly in the room. The big rattan screw was hissing as the blade cut the air.

"Let me go!" cried Ben. "I don't want to try your flying machine!"

"But you must!" insisted the inventor. "This is an opportunity I have long waited for. All the other airship men would not come in when they got as far as the door. They were afraid of me, I guess."

Ben wished he had been more discreet, for he realized that the man was a dangerous lunatic.

"You will soon be sailing through the air; right up through the roof," the German went on, still holding Ben in his arms, while with one foot he pushed over a lever on the floor, thereby increasing the speed of the motor. "You will soon be among the birds. Then you can come down and write an account of it for the paper, and Hans Voller will be famous."

Ben was very much frightened. The man was fairly crushing him in his terrible grip, and, as he approached closer to the machinery, the youth saw that the apparatus was strongly constructed and was revolving at a speed so great that the spiral looked like a thin white streak. The blades were not visible.

He could not imagine what the insane inventor was going to do with him, unless he intended to toss

him into the midst of the whirling screw. In this event, though the material was only light rattan, our hero was likely to be seriously injured, because of the great speed. Also, there was danger that he would come in contact with a live wire or part of the big motor, the vibrations of which shook the whole frail building.

But the German soon showed that he was not going to do any immediate harm to the boy. He suddenly laid the young aviator down on an elevated platform, which Ben at once saw was part of a scale for weighing big objects. The scale was connected to the screw, and the arm, with the weight on, was oscillating up and down.

Before Ben could wiggle away, the German had passed some ropes over him, tying him securely down on the platform. Then he sprang to his feet, leaving the boy lying there, trussed like a fowl.

"Now we are ready to fly!" exclaimed the German, his eyes flashing strangely.

Ben looked in vain for some way of escape. He was tied so tightly he could scarcely move. Close to his head on one side was the motor and on the other the whirring screw, which made such a loud humming that the German's voice, loud as it was, sounded faint and far off.

The inventor busied himself about his machinery for several seconds, adjusting wires, wheels and levers. Then he put some weights on the beam of

the scale. Next he began to figure on some scraps of paper, the while muttering to himself.

"Yes, yes, we shall do it," Ben heard him say. "It is a success. He shall fly."

"You'd better let me go before the police come!" exclaimed the young aviator, thinking to frighten the man. The German only laughed.

"The police never come here!" he cried. "It is too lonesome a place. No one lives here but me. The house is deserted. It is falling to pieces, for the owner will not repair it. It is good enough for me. No one shall disturb us."

"What are you going to do to me?" asked Ben, growing a little calmer.

"I intend you shall fly—that is, theoretically, not actually. This machine is only a model. I put you on the scales. I start my screw. If this little screw can so push against the air, with such force as to cause the beam arm of the scale, with you on the platform, to go up, I know I am successful. That shows that if I make a bigger screw, and revolve it in the opposite direction, so as to lift up, instead of pulling down, as this is doing, I have solved the secret of flying."

The man seemed rational, and his language showed he knew something of the laws of dynamics and pneumatics, but his eyes had a dangerous glare in them, and Ben, in spite of his outward coolness, was much frightened.

"I now prepare to revolve the screw at its highest speed," went on the German, and our hero wondered if it could go any faster and not fly apart from centrifugal force. "When it is at top speed, if the beam of the scale goes up, I am the great inventor. If it does not—I am nothing. Now we are ready. You are going to fly, but you are not going to fly. It is all in theory. But I must reverse the motor," which he quickly did. "I am afraid if I let the screw revolve the other way you would go right out through the roof. We may try that later. I am going to put a string to the electric lever that controls the motor, and pull it from the other room, as there is danger from the great speed if I stay here."

"Are you going to let me be killed?" cried Ben, now thoroughly frightened, and believing that the man meant to harm him. He certainly was in a desperate plight.

"I hope no harm will come to you," spoke the German, with an unpleasant grin. "I have to have some one on which to experiment. You are a good one. I hope you escape. Do not move when the screw begins to go faster."

He had fastened a stout cord to the lever of the electric switch that controlled the motor. This cord he passed through the keyhole of the door, which he unlocked. Then he went out into the hall, closing the door after him, but not locking it, and leaving

Ben, bound and helpless, alone in the room with the strange machinery.

The motor was purring like a great cat, the screw was whizzing around so swiftly just above his head that it made our hero dizzy to watch it. Once more he tried to break the bonds, but they were too tight.

"Look out now!" called the voice of the insane inventor from the hall. "Tell me if the scale beam moves!"

Ben saw the string that passed through the keyhole become taut. He heard the spitting of fire as the copper blade of the switch passed over the various contact points, letting more current flow to the motor. Then he heard the screw set up a shriller hum, as its speed increased.

The scale platform on which he was lying shook and trembled. The whole room vibrated as though a strong wind was shaking the house. Sparks came from the motor, and there was a roar like a miniature cyclone in Ben's ears.

"Don't move!" cried the German from the hall. "Lie still! Watch if the arm moves! You may go through to the cellar! I am going down to catch you!"

Then our hero heard footsteps retreating down the hall. He was alone with the dangerous and rapidly moving machinery, unable to help himself, or to move in case the apparatus flew apart from the awful force that was spinning it around. The

thought was too much for the boy, and he fainted.

How long he remained senseless he did not know, but it could not have been more than a few minutes, as after events proved. When he opened his eyes again he saw a pleasant-faced German youth standing over him, regarding him curiously.

"Ach, Herr Voller!" cried the newcomer. "I find dot you are right on der chob, as dese Americans say. I am a writer from der magazine. Der editor sent me to get a story of your wonderful invention. I come in, as I can make no one hear der bell. I find you experimenting mit it. Tell me all about it. Ven are you going to fly? But you speak de German, and dis American he iss not so easy for me," and with that he launched into a flow of German.

"Wait! Stop! Hold on!" cried Ben above the din of the machinery. "I'm not the inventor of this thing! He's a crazy man, an he fastened me here to experiment with. Cut me loose before he gets back! Stop the machinery!"

"Vot is dot?" cried the magazine man, for such he was. "You are not the inventor? You are tied up by him? Stop der machinery? How shall I do it?"

"First cut me loose!" cried Ben. "I'll stop the motor when I get up! It's liable to fly to pieces now!"

For several seconds the newcomer stood irreso-

lute. It took the idea some time to get all the way in, though when it did he was not slow to act. Whipping out his knife, he cut the ropes that bound Ben. The latter, as soon as he could stand, sprang to the wall, where he had noticed the electric switch, and shut off the current. The motor and screw slowed down, and the hum of machinery stopped.

"It's lucky you came along when you did," said Ben, who was quite pale from his adventure. "I thought I was a goner."

"How did all dis happen?" asked the German magazine writer.

Our hero explained. It appeared that the German magazine man had also received a letter, asking that a reporter be sent to write up the flying machine.

"Dot luck you speak of, he is a queer thing," said the German, when Ben had finished his recital. "I was going first to mine supper, but I dinks I get de story first and eat myself afterwards. Dot is lucky for you."

"That's what it is. Now we'd better get out of here before that crazy inventor comes back. I don't know where he went, though he said he was going to see if I fell through to the cellar."

"Ach, if he is crazy, I wants none of him!" exclaimed the magazine man. "Our life it is hard enough widout such troubles!"

"Hark! Some one is coming!" cried Ben, as footsteps sounded in the hall.

The two made a dash for the door, and got into the corridor just in time to see someone approaching.

"He's coming back! We'd better try for the rear way!" cried Ben.

But it was not the crazy inventor who was coming. Instead it was a man in the uniform of an asylum attendant.

The man questioned Ben and the magazine writer, and then explained how the crazy man had escaped from an asylum some months before. He had hidden himself away so well that he could not be located.

"But we'll get him now," said the attendant, and he was right; the crazy man was captured a little later and taken back to the asylum.

"Gracious, I hope flying machines don't make me crazy!" said Ben, when telling Bob of what has happened.

"They never will," declared Bob. "Your head is too level."

It was a fine morning when the three aviators bade their friends at the settlement farewell and were driven over to the nearest railroad town. Then life became an animated whirl to them.

Newspaper correspondents boarded the train at half a dozen points down the line, eagerly pleading for interviews.

The papers they read were full of the one great popular current theme: "The Lost Aviators." It was a strange situation for Ben to read column after

column covering every phase of public interest, anxiety and speculation in regard to the missing *Dart* and its crew.

It was before daylight the next morning that Ben bade a temporary adieu to Bob and the count. This was at a railroad junction between Blairville and Woodville.

"I must see the folks," he said. "I feel that my first duty. I will come straight on to Blairville afterwards."

Ben's mother shed joyful tears to welcome home again the lost boy whose disappearance had brought many anxious hours of hope and fear. Ben had a hasty breakfast and then took the first train for Blairville.

He was thinking most of the result of the long-distance race as he started for the aviation field. It was with a token of interest, however, that he glanced down the street where the man with the gig lived. Ben had it in mind always to fathom the mystery surrounding that individual when he had aero affairs out of the way.

"Hello," he exclaimed, coming to a halt. "There's the gig standing right in front of the house at this very moment. My man must be at home."

A little girl with golden curls, evidently the child of the man he had sought so vainly, sat alone on the seat of the gig. The horse was secured to an iron ring on the stone curb.

Ben irresistibly started to walk slowly in the direction of the house before which the gig stood. Then with a thrill he sprang into lightning action.

A coal wagon half a block away suddenly dumped its load down an iron chute through a manhole in a sidewalk. The unusual rattle started up the mettled animal attached to the gig.

With a jerk the horse snapped the hitch rein, and with a wild leap the animal darted down the street. The terrified little child on the seat uttered a shrill shriek.

Ben buckled down to a tremendous sprint of speed. He foresaw that the gig would turn the corner. Making a diagonal cut, he reached the middle of the cross road just as the gig swept past. With a spring he caught the back of the high seat, pulled himself over, and seized the little girl, swaying from side to side, and just about to topple to the stone paving blocks.

To his dismay Ben saw that the lines were dragging under the feet of the flying horse. He clung with one hand to the bar at the side of the seat. With the other he seized the shrinking child by the arm. Slowly, cautiously he lowered her over the back of the gig. Not a foot from the ground he released her.

She dropped so gently that she was not even shaken, and simply swayed to one side with a slight

shock. Ben was gratified to see a woman run out into the street and pick up the uninjured child.

Then he turned around to decide on his own best course—to get out of the gig or spring upon the back of the flying horse and attempt to halt the furious runaway.

Before he could make a move the horse made a sharp veer down a side street. The gig was half overturned and Ben was given a frightful fling.

The boy aviator flew through space, struck a section of fence palings, went through them snapping them into fragments, and landed senseless on a garden plot beyond.

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

BEN opened his eyes and looked about him. He was lying in bed in a bright and cheerful room that made him think instantly of home. He had a quick mind, however, and at once knew that this was not home. He tried to rise up, could not stir a limb, and glanced over a trim dressed lady arranging some medicine at a little stand.

"This is a hospital?" he observed.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the nurse. "You are awake."

"Am I hurt much?" was Ben's prompt question.

"There are no bones broken," replied the nurse, coming to his side.

"How soon can I get up to the aviation grounds?"

"You strange boy!" voiced the astonished nurse. "No fever, no delirium, good for at least two weeks here, and talking about going to the aviation grounds. I suppose you would start right off in another of those dreadful airships——"

"If I had the chance? Oh, sure," laughed Ben. "Why, what is there to be serious about?"

"You must ask the doctor, and here he comes," announced the nurse, stepping to one side.

Voices and footsteps sounded in the hall outside. Ben caught the words spoken by one. The tones were familiar, yet puzzling.

"Doctor," a man was saying, "you have given the boy the best room in the hospital?"

"The very best, sir."

"No expense spared, if it's a hundred dollars a day."

"He shall have every care."

"And doctor," added the voice pleadingly, "let me see him. Just a word. Only to tell him my gratitude—the hero who saved the life of my only treasure in the world, my darling little Lena."

"Come to-morrow morning, Mr. Knippel. He must be kept quiet now."

"Ah," murmured Ben, "the man of the gig! It was his child I helped at the runaway," and then a queer weak feeling overcame him, and he drifted into a dream before he could learn or even think of anything further.

Later in the day, however, Ben was awake once more, and strong enough to learn that he had grazed death very narrowly in that terrific runaway experience. The hospital physician explained that there were bruises and fractures that absolute rest

alone could prevent from turning into something critical. Ben took it all in seriously enough. Then he surprised the doctor by suddenly laughing outright.

"You're a merry chap," observed the physician brightly, "what's the funny bone idea now?"

"Why, I was just thinking," explained Ben, "here I go hundreds of miles in an airship that makes people shudder and escape without a scratch. Then I take a fifty-yard ride in an old gig four feet from the ground, and get a tumble that lays me flat. Why, it's like the old sailor who sailed the five oceans for half a century, came home, fell into a ditch with two feet of water in it, and drowned."

There was a tap at the door, and the doctor admitted Ben's mother. She was too sensible a woman to show her concern and make a scene. Not so John Davis, however, who arrived shortly afterwards. The big hearted old aviator sniffled like a schoolboy at a sight of the pride of his eyes lying helpless on a hospital cot.

"Why, the doctor says I'll be as well as ever in a week," remonstrated Ben airily, but really affected at the devotion of his good friend.

"I know, but we had arranged such an ovation for you up at the field," explained Mr. Davis.

"What were going to ovate about, Mr. Davis?" inquired Ben quickly.

"Shall I tell him?" inquired the aviator, and the

doctor nodded assentingly, and the blunt fellow blurted out proudly:

"The *Dart* won the long distance event by two hundred miles!"

"Say—say, that's great!" aspirated Ben, his face beaming. "We're all rich."

"And famous," added the old aviator. "Oh, boy, it was a gallant run!"

The grand news was enough to make any boy well. Ben was sure he would be able to be up and around in two days. The next morning he was interested when a visitor was announced as Mr. Knippel.

Ben was struck with the great change in the appearance of this man since the time he had last seen him. All the shrewd forcible look was subdued. He trembled like a child, and tears stood in his eyes and his voice broke as he poured out his gratitude to the boy who had saved his only darling child from a terrible death.

"It has changed my whole life," he declared. "I am about to give up my business. It has been a bad business. This is a warning. I shall leave the country. Lad, I'm not a poor man. Ask what you will, it shall be yours."

"Do you mean that?" inquired Ben, fixing his eyes on Knippel.

"Heartily."

"Do you know a man named Tom Shallock?"

Mr. Knippel shuffled and colored. He looked embarrassed, but he nodded assentingly.

"I have only one favor to ask," said Ben. "I have reason to believe that this man Shallock has plotted against my father, that you have in your keeping a document of great importance which Shallock stole from my father."

"Boy, that is true," admitted Knippel, greatly agitated. "But tell me more. I only know a part of Shallock's affairs."

Ben recited the whole story of the stolen contract, of the suspected visits of the Shallocks to the Hardy home, of Saxton's accusation of theft against his father. Knippel rose to his feet with a determined look on his face when the recital was concluded.

"I shall go from here at once to your father's lawyer at Woodville," he promised. "The stolen document shall be restored—more, the Shallock plot against your father's good name shall be exposed."

"Thank you," said Ben.

"No, it is I who thanks you," replied Knippel in broken tones, "and my little child blesses you every day."

The following Monday morning, Bob Dallow, chipper as a lark, came to the hospital for Ben in an automobile. Ben was overcome with the greetings that welcomed him at the aviation field. Everybody was packing up to get away, but the Davis quarters were crowded with congratulating profes-

sionals, and a big feast was spread. Ben enjoyed a happy time. Count Beausire had delayed his departure to say good-bye to him.

"Expect an honorary membership from the International Aero Club, my good friend," he said in parting.

Ben wondered what had become of Dick Farrell. He questioned one of the helpers around the flying machines concerning that individual.

"What, ain't you heard about Farrell?" asked the man in surprise.

"Not a word—that is, since I came back."

"He's gone."

"Where to?"

"A whole lot of fellows would like to know that—Burr Rollins especially."

"Then he left rather suddenly?" questioned our hero, curiously.

"He did—for he had to."

"Tell me what you know."

"Well, it was this way, the nearest I can get to it. Farrell and Rollins got into some kind of a quarrel. What it was about I don't know, but I heard 'em having some hot words, and some other men heard it too. Then, out of spite, what does Farrell do but run the *Torpedo* into some old building and smash it up, top, bottom and sides. Maybe Rollins wasn't mad."

"What did he do?"

"He couldn't do nothing. He wanted to have Farrell locked up, but Farrell got out of sight. Then Rollins got into some sort of trouble with the aero managers and he got out too. But before he left he told a friend of mine that Farrell had not only wrecked the flying machine but also taken two hundred dollars of his money and his watch."

"That certainly was a loss," commented Ben.

"Yes, it was, but, in one way, I don't sympathize with Rollins. He wasn't no square man, and it was a mistake to let him enter any of the contests."

"Is he going to build another flying machine to take the place of the *Torpedo?*"

"That I don't know. But I do know one thing—I don't want anything to do with him," returned the man.

"Nor I," concluded our hero.

Mr. Davis and Bob, on invitation, accompanied Ben to Woodville. They put in the first day in a rare whirl of excitement and pleasure. They inspected Mr. Hardy's Airatorium. They visited the Diebold works, and in the evening they formed a merry gladsome group in the pleasant Hardy home. Ben thought he had never seen his father and mother look so pleased and happy.

Bluff Caleb Dunn walked in on them about nine o'clock. He feigned his usual grim manner, but Ben saw that the hard-headed old fellow was secretly greatly pleased about something.

"Well, Hardy," observed Dunn, "I've attended to the business you're too easy and good natured to attend to yourself."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hardy mildly.

"All hands are satisfied, so we'll make a public meeting of it," went on the practical old fellow. "The whole secret is out. That man Knippel before leaving the country delivered that contract about the automobile patents to your lawyer, Mr. Pearsons. We have just got through showing it to old Saxton and his lawyer and calling them down to terms."

"How was it settled?" asked Mr. Hardy.

"Saxton has agreed to restore to you seventy-five per cent. interest in all the patents. He claims the other twenty-five per cent. for financing and promoting the inventions."

"Does that seem enough?" questioned the fair-minded Mr. Hardy.

"Oh, no!" cried Caleb Dunn with good-natured sarcasm. "Ought to have given Saxton the whole thing, as you tried to do once. We're your guardians, and we nailed the old skinflint down to the last cent we could. So that's all settled. The whole secret came out. It was Tom Shallock who stole the contract from you. He held it as a threat over Saxton, and that was the mystery of his influence with the old man. Saxton has fired Shallock now, though."

"What for?" inquired Ben.

"Stealing. He and his son Dave, and that pre-

cious Dick Farrell have been stealing supplies from the Saxton works for years. They belonged to a ring of junk dealers. That man Knippel headed the crowd. They had secret signs, and that pin you found in your work shed was an emblem of their order. Dave Shallock dropped it there the night he dumped a bag of fittings in the shed. His father put up the contract with Knippel as security for money he borrowed. The whole plot has been exposed, the Shallocks are disgraced, and your father's name, Ben, comes out clear as crystal."

"Oh, I am so glad and happy!" murmured Mrs. Hardy.

"There's more, too," announced Mr. Dunn.

"Tell it," said Mr. Hardy.

"Saxton is all broken up, and he is going to sell out to the Diebold people. That means a new manager, Hardy, and you're the man."

"Oh, dear!" said the delighted Mrs. Hardy.

"As to you, old grumbler," Caleb Dunn hailed Mr. Davis pleasantly, "I heard you railing around about being too old to sail around in the air much longer."

"And clumsy," added the old aviator.

"Very well, here's your chance: You know the aviators all along the line. The Diebold company will pay you more money than you ever earned before to sell the Hardy new model monoplane."

"That's a go," declared Mr. Davis enthusiastical-

ly. "It gives me congenial employment and keeps me in touch with my old friends."

"Of course Ben and I are independent," observed Bob, jingling some gold coins in his pocket, "but we'd like a show at some honest employment."

"Till school begins again," supplemented Ben. "You know, Bob, you agreed to attend to the education feature while you had money to do it."

"All right," said Dunn. "In the meantime though, Bob can pick up a few dollars selling the airship men supplies, and Ben can take charge of adjusting them."

"The very thing!" cried Bob, "so long as Ben and I work in a team, we'll be both satisfied."

And the flying machine boys shook hands over the bargain, and everybody was happy.

THE END

TO THE READER

Now that you have finished reading this story, we desire to call your attention to all the other volumes in this remarkable series for boys.

We feel that we have made a distinct find in Mr. Frank V. Webster, who is under contract to write exclusively for the Cupples & Leon Company. Mr. Webster's style is very much like that of the late-lamented Mr. Alger, but his tales are all thoroughly up-to-date. This author, though still young, has been a great traveler, and therefore he knows exactly what he is writing about, be it a story of city or country life, a tale of the far west, or of the frozen north.

"How can you write such fine stories?" a boy once asked Mr. Webster.

"Oh, I guess it comes natural," answered the author. "I have been through so much and seen so much, it seems as if I could go on telling stories forever."

On the following pages we give the outlines of some of Mr. Webster's stories. Read them—they will interest you.

TOM THE TELEPHONE BOY

"Now what in the world can such a message as that mean?"

That was the question that Tom, the telephone boy, asked himself one day. It was a curious message that came over the wires, and it meant a good deal, as the lad soon discovered. What the sending of that message led to is told in detail in Mr. Webster's story, "Tom, the Telephone Boy; or, The Mystery of a Message." This is a tale of city life. Tom is the hero, and there is also a queer old fellow, Dr. Lemuel Spidderkins. who will make you roar. The telephone boy was the main support of his mother, and he had to work hard to keep a roof over the head of the family.

To the youth who wants to know what life in the big city really is this volume will prove of the greatest interest. One day we asked Mr. Webster if such a lad as Tom really existed.

"I met Tom in Chicago," said Mr. Webster. "He is as bright as a button, and I know the boys like him just as much as I do."

Like all the other Frank V. Webster books issued by the Cupples & Leon Company, New York, this volume is bound in cloth, and is well illustrated. The price is forty cents.

If at any time you want a catalogue of all the books written by Mr. Webster, write to the Cupples & Leon Company, New York City, for it. It will come to you free.

THE BOY FROM THE RANCH

Did you ever stop to think how strange life in a big city must appear to a boy who has never been anywhere but on the boundless plains?

"I simply had to write that story—I couldn't help it," said Mr. Webster, in telling us how "The Boy from the Ranch; or, Roy Bradner's City Experiences," came to be penned. "Some years ago I was on a ranch, and there I met a lad just like Roy, who told me of all the things that had happened to him when he went to Chicago for his uncle on business."

In this story of life on the plains and in New York, Roy is a clever lad who knows how to take his own part, no matter what happens. His father being sick, he is sent to the great metropolis to transact some business. Everything is new and strange to him and he makes some queer mistakes which make very funny reading. He falls into the hands of a sharper who has been cheating Mr. Bradner out of the income of some valuable property. The sharper and his tools try to get the ranch boy out of the way. But—well, Roy turns the tables, and makes things mighty warm for the fellows.

A splendid volume, bound in cloth, and well illustrated. Published by the Cupples & Leon Company, at forty cents. Sent postpaid if you cannot get it from your bookseller.

THE YOUNG TREASURE HUNTER

Do you like stories of the frozen north? of great hardships amid ice and snow? and of thrilling encounters with wild beasts and with thieving Indians? If you do you will not want to miss Frank V. Webster's book entitled: "The Young Treasure Hunter; or, Fred Stanley's Trip to Alaska."

"The most interesting story of the Alaskan gold fields I ever read," one boy has written to us. "My father was one of the first men to go to Alaska, and he says the pictures of life there are true. I guess Mr. Webster must have been there himself."

This story tells of how a poor boy joined a party in search of a golden treasure, and of how, after the treasure was discovered, a bad man, aided by some Alaskan Indians, tried to get the wealth away. Fred proved himself a hero on more than one occasion, and we know all boys will like him for that. On one occasion the youth brings down a fine moose, and on another he and his chum suffer from snow blindness and become lost in the dazzling whiteness.

This book might easily have been issued at one dollar or one dollar and a half, but Mr. Webster insisted that the price be made the same as on all his other volumes, namely, forty cents. Issued by the Cupples & Leon Company, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere.

THE YOUNG FIREMEN OF LAKEVILLE

"Fire! fire! fire!"

That is the cry that sometimes thrills us, ringing out during the day or in the silent hours of the night. And who is it whose heart does not jump within him when he sees the devouring flames leaping skyward, and sees the engines, hose-carts and long hook-and-ladder trucks dashing through the streets to put out the conflagration?

The life of the fireman is one full of excitement and often of peril. This Mr. Frank V. Webster fully realized when he wrote, "The Young Firemen of Lakeville; or, Herbert Dare's Pluck." How the boys became dissatisfied with the old "bucket brigade" and organized a real fire company, and how they worked at more than one fire, is told with great fidelity to life. And then there is the secret of the old mansion, and that is worked up in Mr. Webster's best style.

"The mystery in this story is taken from life," Mr. Webster wrote us. "It surrounded an old man and a fortune worth nearly half a million dollars. A good-for-nothing grandson wanted to get it away from him."

Published, as are all the Frank V. Webster books, by the Cupples & Leon Company, New York Bound in cloth, illustrated, and for sale everywhere at forty cents.

THE NEWSBOY PARTNERS

"Say, what's the matter with you, anyhow?"

That was the question that Jimmy Small, a New York newsboy, asked when first he met Dick, in a dark alleyway, where Jimmy had gone to sleep because he didn't have the price of a bed at the lodging-house.

Dick was a well-dressed boy, and lay there with a nasty cut on the head. He couldn't tell how he had got into the alleyway or where he had come from. All he could remember was his first name—and as he was found in a box, Jimmy called him Dick Box.

The poor newsboy befriended Dick, and the two became partners. Dick could not remember his past, but he remembered how to read and write, and he taught Jimmy, and the two worked their way upward. Then one day something happened —something truly wonderful—and Dick—well, he didn't remain poor, unknown Dick Box for a great while longer.

This story, issued under the title of "The Newsboy Partners; or, Who Was Dick Box?" is a fascinating tale, told in Mr. Webster's best style. Splendidly illustrated, bound in cloth, price forty cents. Published by the Cupples & Leon Co., New York. Ask your bookseller to show you this volume.

THE BOY PILOT OF THE LAKES

"I once spent a whole summer knocking around the Great Lakes," said Mr. Webster, when speaking of his story, "The Boy Pilot of the Lakes; or, Nat Morton's Perils." I managed to get acquainted with half a dozen pilots, including one old man who had been at the wheel for over thirty years. They told me of many adventures they had had, and some of those appear in this book."

It is a strong, helpful tale, telling how Nat Morton worked his way upward in spite of many difficulties. There is a great storm scene, and a collision in the fog, and many other things to thrill and hold the reader. Nat was a regular water rat, and when he did an old pilot a service he was given a chance on one of the lake steamers. Another lad was jealous of Nat's luck, and he did all in his power to bring the boy pilot to grief. But Nat was on the alert, and showed what a fine manly youth he was by returning good for evil.

"That's the kind of a boy I like to write about," said Mr. Webster. "A lad who is gritty and honest to the core. I hope every boy will set Nat Morton up as his model in life."

We are certain all healthy boys will want this volume. It is well printed, well bound, and well illustrated, and the price is forty cents. Ask your bookseller for it, or send direct to the Cupples & Leon Company, New York.

TWO BOY GOLD MINERS

One day Mr. Frank V. Webster came to our office and brought the manuscript of the story "Two Boy Gold Miners; or, Lost in the Mountains."

"Frank," the editor asked, "you have been round so much, tell me, have you ever gone gold mining?"

"Once—just once," was the author's answer. "Of course I have been in the gold fields a number of times. But I only went mining once. I was out exactly two weeks, nearly broke my back with digging, got about sixty dollars' worth of gold dust, got lost in a thunderstorm in the mountains, and had a whole lot of things happen." And then he laughed heartily at the recollection.

The story shows that it is written from experience. It is a splendid tale, showing how two boys, Jed and Will Crosby, left a farm in the middle-west to try their luck as miners. They had all sorts of difficulties to overcome, and had not a few encounters with wild animals and with bad men, and they found out that gold mining was by no means a "cinch," as one expressed it. And then when they got lost—well, that was something neither of them had calculated on. You will like these boys—you simply can't help it.

If you want the book you can buy it from any first-class bookseller for forty cents, or we will send it to you, post free, for the amount. The Cupples & Leon Company, New York.

JACK THE RUNAWAY

Not long ago one of the largest circuses in the world showed in New York City. Of course it didn't put up any tents, for there is no room. It showed in a big building.

"I am going to write a story about that circus," said Mr. Webster. "It will be easy, too, for I am now writing about a lad who ran away from home —or rather, ran away from the old crabbed college professor with whom he lived. That boy loved animals, and loved to do acrobatic stunts, and I am going to have him join the 'Greatest Show on Earth.' "

Mr. Webster kept his promise, and the result is the book, "Jack the Runaway; or, On the Road with a Circus." It is a volume teeming with good things, telling how Jack simply had to run away, how he joined the circus and got acquainted with some of the performers and wild animal trainers, and how he even took the part of a clown.

"The best circus story I ever read," said an acrobat who happened to peruse the book. "Say, that writer must have traveled with some show sure! It's got the smell of the ring all right!"

This volume is issued by the Cupples & Leon Company, New York, and the price is forty cents —by mail or from any bookseller. If you want a complete catalogue of the very best books for boys, send to the Cupples & Leon Company for it.

BOB THE CASTAWAY

One day Mr. Webster came into our office and placed a manuscript on the desk of our editor.

"Did you ever take a sea voyage when you were a boy?" he asked as he dropped into a chair.

The editor said he had never had that pleasure.

"Well, I did—and I was wrecked, too," went on the author. "And I was sent to sea for the same reason that Bob Henderson had to go."

Then we got very curious and read the story, which had for its title: "Bob the Castaway; or, The Wreck of the Eagle." We had to laugh when we read that yarn. Bob was such a fun-loving fellow, and he played such awful jokes. He tried to play a joke on an old sea captain at a church donation party, but, to the boy's horror, the minister got the benefit (?) of the fun. Then Bob's parents sent him to sea to cure him, and the boy was wrecked on an island in the Pacific, and had many thrilling adventures. It's a true-to-life story, for it contains many pages out of Mr. Webster's own experiences. A very nervous passenger on the ship makes a lot of unconscious fun. There is a great hurricane, and an encounter with South Sea natives.

A fine volume, bound in cloth, and well illustrated, and the price is forty cents. Buy it from your bookseller, or send to the Cupples & Leon Company, New York, for it.

ONLY A FARM BOY

To the lad who likes a story of country life, full of fun and excitement, we feel safe in recommending Mr. Webster's story, "Only a Farm Boy; or, Dan Hardy's Rise in Life." Dan was a poor boy, living with a miserly farmer who gave him no wages and treated him shamefully. One night the lad was sent on an errand to a distant village, and returning by moonlight, saw some men acting in a mysterious fashion in the woods. A robbery had been committed, and through a curious chain of circumstances, some thought poor Dan was guilty. But he had one friend who stood up for him—an old village blacksmith—and between them they set to work to bring the guilty party to justice and clear Dan's name.

"He's guilty, an' I know it!" said the miserly farmer for whom Dan worked.

"He is innocent, and it is a shame for you to say otherwise," declared the old blacksmith.

"Well, time will tell," answered the old farmer, and then he wanted Dan to come back and work for him.

"I'll not come back," said the boy. And then there was a bitter quarrel.

This story makes a splendid volume, bound in cloth, and is finely illustrated. The price is forty cents, and it is published, like all the other Frank V. Webster books, exclusively by the Cupples & Leon Company, New York.

COMRADES OF THE SADDLE

THE editor of the Cupples & Leon Company's books for boys was one day wondering why he did not hear from Mr. Frank V. Webster, when the letter man delivered to him a very-much worn and soiled letter, with a postmark that could scarcely be deciphered. The letter proved to be from a little town away off in a corner of Montana and was written by Mr. Webster.

"I am having the time of my life," wrote the noted author of books for boys. "I am up here on a ranch known as the Half Moon, and I am spending my days in the saddle, rounding up cattle, hunting and knocking around generally. It's great! Wish you were here. When I get back I am going to write a book about it."

Mr. Webster was as good as his word, and soon turned over to us "Comrades of the Saddle; or, The Young Rough Riders of the Plains." It is full of excitement and one bound to hold the reader's attention from first to last. It is published at forty cents and can be had from any good bookseller. If you wish a complete catalogue of Mr. Webster's books for boys send to us for it, and we will mail it to you free.

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